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MADGE DUNRAVEN

By the Author of
"The Queen of Connaught"

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MADGE DUNRAVEN.

A Tale.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MADGE DUNRAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

'SPEAK LOW, IF YOU SPEAK LOVE.'

EVERYBODY knew everybody's business in Armstead, and it would therefore have been the easiest thing in the world for Conn to discover who was his mysterious beauty of the wood. His cousin George Aldyn could, with a very few words, have set his mind at rest, and perhaps have saved him

from the trouble into which he was so unconsciously but surely rushing.

But Conn preferred that all should remain a mystery. Ever since that dreamy meeting with Rosamond in the twilight, his thoughts had dwelt upon her more and more. The pathetic beauty of her face was ever before him, filling his soul by day and haunting his dreams by night.

Had he met the girl under the most ordinary conditions, it is more than probable that she would have succeeded in arousing his latent affections, for there was a subtle charm about her which touched the hearts of all. But the secrecy of their meetings and the whole mystery which surrounded her attracted Conn the more, and bewitched him twentyfold.

On every alternate day during that week, he haunted the stream in the hope

of meeting her, but she did not come; and on each occasion he returned to his home more fretful than before. If he could only see her once again, he thought, his mind would be more at ease, and he would try to keep his thoughts from dwelling upon her at all.

Thus the week passed and Sunday came. In the morning he went with his father and Madge to hear mass, and in the evening he wandered forth alone.

It was hot and sultry in the house, but out-of-doors the air was balmy and cool; summer was changing into autumn, as day was just waning into night. All the hay had been cut and gathered, the corn was of a rich gold, and the thick hedges which enclosed the roads were turning from bright emerald to a dim burnished green. The last rays of the setting sun were falling across

field and river, and the sky stretched clear and calm above. As Conn walked moodily along he quite unconsciously entered the lane which Madge had traversed in the hot summer weather, and which led up to Rigby Castle.

It was very quiet everywhere that night, for the curate, who did most of Mr. Aldyn's work, was holding evening service in the church. There seemed nobody in the lane when he entered it, yet he had not walked half a dozen yards when a gigantic shadow was thrown across the road right before his feet. He started and looked around; there was no one near; the shadow had vanished; a light breeze rustled the hedge at his side, then passed away.

Conn thought no more of it and walked quietly on. He had gone about a quarter of a mile when he was again brought to a

standstill; a figure passed rapidly through a gate close to him; ran down into the road and turned towards him the face of Rosamond Leigh.

She started and coloured on seeing Conn, but in a moment her usual self-possession returned to her, and she held out her hand.

'Destiny always seems to be employed in throwing us together, Mr. Dunraven,' she said, with one of her bright smiles; 'that is to say,' she added, hastily, 'if Destiny—to speak allegorically—would trouble herself about matters so trivial at all!'

At first Conn said nothing; he had become singularly reticent while in Rosamond's company, and he seemed to be more so than usual that night. But ah! what a thrill passed through him when her hand touched his, and what strange emotion

seemed to possess him when she smiled upon him!

'Have you been to church?' asked Conn, glancing at the Prayer-book which she held in her hand.

'No; I came out with the intention of going, but thought better of it. I am very fortunate, you see.'

'How so?' asked Conn. Despite his Irish origin he was very obtuse.

'In having met you,' she said aloud; adding mentally, 'We are reversing positions I think—the great booby, to make me flatter him!'

Conn said nothing, but the look in his eyes made Rosamond flush and turn her face away. Was she venturing too far? Perhaps; and yet she had not the courage to leave him.

'Are you going this way?' asked Conn.

'Yes,' she returned. 'Why?'

'Because I am going to see you home to-night!'

'Indeed you are not!' said Rosamond, hastily.

'Why?'

'Because I prefer to go alone!'

For a time the two walked on in silence. Presently Conn turned to his companion and found that she was quietly watching him.

'Have you any particular motive in keeping your identity a secret from me?'

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

'Why should I have? My name is Rosamond Leigh. I am Lord Rigby's ward, of whom no doubt you have often heard before.'

As she spoke she furtively watched his

face, and as she did so a look of disappointment darkened her own fair features. Up to that moment she had regarded Conn as somewhat beneath her in social position, and one of her reasons for remaining *incognita* was the fear of overwhelming him with confusion. To her amazement, however, he did not look overwhelmed in the least.

'Well,' she asked presently, brightening up again, 'what was your reason for so particularly wishing to know?'

Conn shrugged his shoulders.

'It seems strange not to know the names of one's friends.'

'Friends!—we were strangers a fortnight since!'

'Yes, I know we were; and every time you disappear I think I shall never see you again!'

'That would be dreadful, would it not?'

'Yes,' said Conn, with dangerous softness.

Rosamond withdrew her hand from his arm, sat down on the grassy bank and pushed back her hat.

'How warm it is this evening! For my part, I shall not be sorry when the autumn comes; this heat renders the roads quite unfit for walking. See, the dust is already inches thick on my boots!'

As she spoke she lifted up for his inspection a small foot covered with bronze kid and shining steel buckles.

'Shall we walk through the meadows?' asked Conn.

She laughed petulantly.

'Worse still, for at this hour the long grass is always damp with dew. We had

better say good-bye,' she said, holding forth her hand.

'What, already?' exclaimed Conn; 'we have hardly been five minutes together!'

'Some people would think it five minutes too much!'

'You know I don't, at any rate!'

'You seem to have a marvellous power of reading my mind.'

'No, I haven't; I wish to God I had!'

'Why, pray?'

'Because then I should know whether or not you ever think of me during my absence.'

She laughed uneasily again, rose hastily from her seat and moved a few steps away.

'Are you going up this dark lane alone?' asked Conn, when he had reached her side.

She nodded her head.

'You are determined not to let me see you to the Castle?'

'Quite. If you persist I shall not stir another step.'

'Very well, then, good-bye.'

Conn took her hand, held it for a moment in his, and raised it to his lips. Rosamond did not pull it angrily away this time, but she glanced uneasily around to see if they were alone.

'When am I to see you again?' asked Conn.

'I really don't know; soon, perhaps. Pray let me go; it is getting dark, and I shall be afraid!'

In a moment she was free, and hastening with tremulous steps up the dark, shadowy lane. As he stood upon the spot where she had left him, Conn watched her

go. The evening shadows lay thick around her, the tall trees rocked their branches above, and what was that—a shadow? nay, a figure—a man who crept from the hedge, leapt lightly into the road, and stealthily followed her. In a moment Conn ran forward; in a few moments more he had reached the bend in the road, seized the man by the shoulder, and brought him face to face. Then Conn recognised the beggar-man who had slept one night by his father's kitchen fire.

'What were you creeping after that lady for?' asked Conn angrily; and the man, shrinking away and shaking off the other's hold, replied surlily:

'What the —— is that to you?'

'It's a good deal to me,' said Conn. 'The best thing you can do is to keep a civil tongue in your head and make

your way out of the village, and not continue hiding behind hedges and watching people about, or you'll get into more trouble before you've done.'

Why it was that he was constantly finding this man hovering about Rosamund's track, Conn did not know, nor did he wait to inquire just then. He was too much disquieted at the thought of his own doings having been known, only too glad —when the man had slunk away—to hasten away too.

CHAPTER II.

'WE'RE A BAD LOT, MADGE.'

FOR more than a week after that night when the Dunravens had taken the outcast man to their home, George Aldyn did not go to meet Madge in her evening walk from the convent. Madge was a good deal surprised at this, but very little disappointed. Although, being as she was of a loving nature, she could not help feeling a certain amount of affection for this cynical young Adonis,

there were so many things in him which jarred upon her, and prevented her enjoying his society as she otherwise would have done. So, on the whole, Madge thought it was perhaps as well for her to walk home in the gloaming alone. At the end of a week, Madge had quite ceased to expect him, and had almost given up looking for him; she was, therefore, a good deal surprised when at length he appeared again.

'You don't seem to be a very apt pupil, Madge,' he said, when he had shaken hands with her and was walking by her side. 'Don't you remember the very profound observations I made to you about indiscriminate charity a few days ago?'

'I remember you said something about it,' returned Madge quietly; 'why?'

'Because you don't seem to have taken it much to heart!'

Madge looked at him in a puzzled way. She did not know what he meant, and she told him so.

'Well, what I mean is,' said George, in desperation, 'why did you allow my uncle and Conn to make such a devil of a row among the rustics the other night?'

Madge looked puzzled still. She did not for a moment think that he referred to the hunted man.

'Well, isn't it true,' he asked, 'that my uncle leapt into the middle of a lot of roughs who were on his lawn; swore at them in Irish, and beat them down with his stick, and that Conn felled one or two like bullocks, while those wild servants of yours cheered and looked on?'

'True, of course it is true!' said Madge,

looking to the spirit and not the letter of the question. 'Your father came down the next day, and told us that we were all a disgrace to him!'

'Well, between ourselves, you know I think the governor was justified!'

'Yes?'

'It's hardly the sort of way for sensible people to go on.'

'Then you think it would have been more sensible if we had allowed the poor man to be killed?'

'Killed?—they wouldn't have killed him—the brutes are too frightened of hanging for that. But the fellow had just come off the treadmill, and should never have been admitted into any respectable house.'

Madge said nothing, and presently her companion continued:

'Besides, these sort of acts get you such

a bad name in the place. These loutish brutes have never been accustomed to that sort of thing, and they look down upon you for your kindness. They will take, as long as you choose to give, let them alone for that; but those very people whom you allow to hang about your kitchen and eat your food, sneer at you when your backs are turned, and actually pity you for your supposed ignorance of the manners and customs of English ladies and gentlemen."

Still Madge was silent; her cheek began to burn, her heart to sink, for, as her companion spoke, she thought of that night only a few months ago, when she had walked up and down upon the lawn and had thus accidentally overheard the remarks of their departing 'guests.' 'Be they gentlefolks, think you?' 'Guess not; gentlefolks don't take up wi' the likes o' we.'

She turned again to her companion.

'I am not sorry even now that we took the poor man in,' she said; 'they were treating him cruelly, and he was almost starved, and I think he is the only one who has come into the house without stealing. They are all such dreadful thieves here; whenever a person comes into the kitchen, we are sure to miss something, and one night last week some one crept in during the night and took away Uncle Patrick's coat!'

'How did they get in?'

'By the front door, I suppose.'

'But wasn't it locked?'

'Not at all; we never thought of locking it, because we did not know that there was danger.'

'You might have known that to leave

your door unlocked was like inviting people to come in.'

'I don't know why it should be. There were no locks on the doors of Shranamonragh Castle and no shutters to the windows, and yet the people never stole. Always during the winter nights the kitchen was full; sometimes as many as three beggars were sleeping on straw beside the kitchen fire, and though the cupboards were always open and food was about in plenty, they never took a scrap! Any one of them would rather have starved than take what did not rightly belong to him!'

'Honest people!'

'Indeed they were; but they were Irish, not English!'

The grave look disappeared from George Aldyn's face, and the cynical smile returned to his proud lips.

'You've hit upon the truth with an accuracy which does you credit, Madge,' he said; 'the Irish and the English are two different races of people, therefore the same treatment with both won't do.'

Madge was silent again. She could not at any time run on glibly and flippantly as George Aldyn could, and just now she was less inclined to talk than usual, her mind being filled with thoughts which she had a great reluctance to discuss with such a cold and cynical companion. The last few months had worked a wondrous change in her—a change which at first she had been slow to feel, but which was now so strong upon her that it damped her enjoyment of life. It seemed to her as if summer had suddenly dissolved into winter; as if a blight had passed over the land and blackened the meadows around her. Less

than a year ago she had been a free and buoyant girl, untainted by pride, unfettered by the prudish conventionalities of modern life. At home they had been open-handed with the stranger, hospitable and kindly to the poor, willing to share their little all with the outcasts, and let their fellow-creatures partake of their joy. They had come to England prepared to do the same, but here their hospitality had been accepted and laughed at, and their kindness abused. There was something about the English which Madge could not understand, and the man who walked beside her seemed to her as incomprehensible as the rest.

Her meditations were interrupted by her companion's voice.

'What do you think I heard last night, Madge?'

'I don't know.'

'Two tramps talking; one was bemoaning his ill-luck, so the other said, "You've missed the best house in the village, you fool; it's a little red cottage with roses before it. There's an Irishman there that 'ud give help to the devil himself if he'd but the courage to ax it. Go and try your luck, Jim, and we'll share the spoil.'

'If all the people in Armstead were like my uncle Patrick, there would be no stealing,' said Madge, hotly. 'It is because you lock up your houses and your money that the people get bad. They are so poor and you are so rich; if you will not give to them, no wonder they steal.'

'But *you* give to them, and yet they steal from you.'

'Yes, indeed they do!'

'The fact is we're a bad lot, Madge. It would take an earthquake to regenerate us

and make us like you; confess it, Miss Earnest.'

Then, when he paused to say good-bye, and stood with her hand in his, he added:

'But do not bother your little head so much about us, Madge; we are not worth the trouble.'

The warning was unheeded; other and more important cares were soon to fill Madge's busy brain—cares before which all these minor difficulties were to sink into nothing.

George Aldyn had lingered longer than usual with Madge that night, and when he reached home he found that dinner was waiting for him; so he entered the drawing-room hurriedly, gave his arm to his mother, and the two following in the

rector's footsteps, passed through the draped archway to the lighted dining-room beyond.

'What makes you so late, George?' asked Mr. Aldyn when the three were seated at dinner.

'I've been botanising in the lanes with Madge Dunraven,' replied George, carelessly. Mrs. Aldyn looked displeased, though she said nothing more. But when at length the servants had left the room, she took up the thread of the conversation.

'You will soon have some one else to occupy your time, George,' she said, turning to her son. 'Rosamond is coming to stay with us for a time.'

'Rosamond Leigh coming here?' returned George, in amazement.

'I knew you would be surprised, dear, for

I was myself; but your father has arranged it all. Lord Rigby is going to town for a fortnight, and as it would be dull for Rosamond at the Castle, your father has invited her to stay here.'

'It will be quite as dull for her here, I should think.'

'Not at all,' said the vicar, testily; 'that is to say, not if you behave yourself decently. There has been enough shilly-shallying about this marriage, George. I have asked Miss Leigh here that you may arrange matters with her at once.'

George Aldyn shrugged his shoulders.

'A nice position I am in to offer marriage to a girl like Rosamond Leigh.'

'Don't be a fool, George,' returned his father. 'You're in as good a position as a young man need be, and a deuced deal better off than I was when I married.

these social questions with the girl, but what a hash I should make of it if I were to be guided by her. She says I'm selling myself; suppose I am? I'm not one alone by a long way; everybody does the same thing nowadays. One can read about romantic attachments in novels, and it's all very nice there, but for the hard realities of life give me good solid cash! If I don't take Rosamond and her few thousand pounds, they'll doubtless go to somebody else who won't be as well worth them. With me she knows what she's doing. I'm not desperately in love with her, I know; but I never professed to be, as half a dozen other fellows would, for I hate humbug. If I am rather cold and calculating, thank God I'm not ashamed to own it!'

He paused for a time, watching the trees which swayed gently above his head;

then he again turned upon his heel with a laugh—that hard, cynical laugh which had so often jarred upon Madge's nerves, and made her resentment against him so strong.

'What humbug it all is!' he said; 'every man and woman in the world is a humbug as far as I can see, and my own mother and father are matches for the best. When I marry Rosamond my mother will pretend to her friends that it is a happiness to see her darling boy so fond of his pretty wife; at the wedding-breakfast the governor will make a speech about the sacredness of love, and feel all the time that there isn't a shred of it between us. They know in their secret hearts that if I did marry for love and not money, they would disown me and almost turn me off without a penny! Heigh-ho! it's the way

of the world; and we, to whose share the good things of the world fall, have no great cause of complaint after all!'

And having finished his pipe, he entered the house and dismissed the subject from his mind.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE RECTORY.

'WHY, Madge, how your eyes sparkle! what makes you so flushed to-night, mavourneen?' asked Mr. Dunraven, putting his arm kindly around the girl and drawing her to his side.

'I don't know, uncle, unless because I'm so happy,' returned Madge, smoothing back the silver hair and pressing her warm cheek against her uncle's brow. 'Sister

Cecilia said to-day that I had no right to feel so glad because it was my last day at school, but I couldn't help it. Are you going to fish to-morrow, Conn?' she added.

'Yes, I think so,' Conn replied, glancing up from the fly which he held, half-manufactured, in his hand.

'May I go with you, then?' asked Madge.

In a moment a shadow passed over Conn's face.

'I think you'd better not,' he said.

'Why not, Conn?' returned Madge; 'you were glad enough for me to come when we were at home!'

'Well, of course,' said Conn, growing more and more confused; 'but somehow it's different here, Madge. It's not exactly the custom, in England, for young ladies to go out fishing.'

'Very well,' said Madge, 'I will stay at home!'

Her heart sank, but it was not at the prospect of losing a day's amusement. Since she came to England everything was changing, and Conn seemed changing with the rest.

From his chair in the chimney corner Mr. Dunraven had been watching his son's face. When Conn had finished speaking he got up and laid his broad hand kindly on his shoulder.

'Conn,' he said, quietly, 'don't you be a humbug, my boy. Sure, we see heaps o' that about us now without picking it up ourselves.'

Conn's handsome face flushed up, but he bit his lip and said nothing.

'I've always tried to make you honest,' continued Mr. Dunraven kindly, 'and it

will be a sorrowful day to me if I see my work undone. We've had many a hard pull to keep things together, but, thank God! we never in the whole course of our lives did an act that a Dunraven would blush for. The world wouldn't be like it is if one half of the people didn't try to measure their ways by those of the others. Never pretend to be better than you are, my boy; keep a clear conscience, be guided by it rather than by what "people will think," and for Heaven's sake never turn into an omadhaun like—well, like your Cousin George!'

'Speak of the —— and he'll appear!' chimed in a voice, as George Aldyn, hat in hand, entered through the open doorway.

'I believe I heard you mention my name as I came in. Excuse my unceremonious appearance, but, as I found the

front door open, I thought it unnecessary to remain outside. By the way, I strongly advise you to look more carefully after your bolts and bars, or some passing tramp will betray your confidence again!'

'I believe the scoundrels would take the coat off my back,' said Mr. Dunraven, 'if they thought they wouldn't be found out!'

'Of course they would,' returned George. 'It's the nature of the beast, you know; but I didn't come here to-night to discuss the exceedingly rotten condition of our lower orders, but to see if I could induce you to come and spend a few hours at the Rectory?'

He looked at Madge, and she passed on his look to her uncle and Conn. As she did so, George smiled to himself. It was really Madge whom he wanted, for in truth he was at heart rather jealous of Conn, whose

superiority was as great in point of mere physical beauty as in point of sheer masculine vigour and strength. And yet, since he wanted Madge, he knew that he must ask the whole three, for where one went the others were sure to follow. So, making a virtue of necessity, he looked round at the other two.

'Do come,' he said, 'and have some dinner with us. We are dreadfully dull up there; and,' he added, turning again to Madge, 'since you've no lessons to do to-night, Madge, come and have a glass of champagne.'

'Shall we go, uncle?' asked Madge, looking at her uncle and Conn at the same time.

Madge was indifferent whether she went or stayed. Conn had already succeeded in robbing the evening of any pleasure for her, and she was careless as to how it

might end. Not so Conn. He thought it would be pleasant to spend a few hours at the Rectory, and he said so boldly and openly. Although he had as great a dislike to George Aldyn as that young gentleman had to him, and although he had a positive contempt for the rector and some slight aversion for the rector's wife, he thought that an evening spent at the Rectory would be better than lingering at home. He was uncomfortable now, fearing that his father might again touch upon the subject which he dreaded. So they agreed to go. Madge ran upstairs to fetch her hat; as she was searching for it in her drawer, a figure entered the room, and in a moment she felt herself clasped in Conn's strong arms.

'Madge, darling, don't be angry.'

'I am not angry, Conn.'

'Because,' said Conn, 'you shall go to-morrow if you wish. Wouldn't I rather give up fishing for ever than pain you?'

'Yes, yes.'

'You forgive me—and you will come?'

'I have nothing to forgive,' said Madge. 'After all, you were right, Conn, but I am foolish, and have not got out of our old ways yet.'

She gave a little sob, but it was a sob of joy, and laid her soft cheek upon his breast. Such moments as these compensated for all the drawbacks in Madge's life. To feel Conn's presence near her, to hear his deep voice murmuring in her ear, constituted all the pleasure which she had ever hoped for. His face was her sunshine, and when a cloud passed over it, it seemed to darken her very soul. Could the evening but have ended so!—could she but

have remained clasped thus in Conn's strong arms, pressed thus to his breast, her girlhood would have been brighter than even in her wildest dreams she had ever dared to wish!

But one soft kiss upon her cheek brought the dream to an end, and then she and Conn descended the stairs together. Mr. Dunraven and George Aldyn were waiting for them in the hall, and George was astonished at the look of subdued happiness which was now upon her face. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips were parted, and her eyes were full of the light of joy. There was a depth of feeling in her eyes which George Aldyn could not understand; she seemed to be looking not at, but beyond, him, at something which sent lights and shadows across her face as over the surface of a wind-swept pool.

With the setting of last night's sun, the last day of summer seemed to have waned; an autumnal spirit had set in, bringing with it a new sense of calm to wood and water, and drawing cool subtle scents from valley and hill. In a clear sky above them sailed the harvest moon, shining upon wood and water, upon the corn ricks, the meadows, and touching with tremulous silver the peaks of the distant hills. In the trees that shadowed the roadside the breeze made soft murmurings such as lovers like to hear.

To Madge, walking along the moonlit lanes with the dewy meadows on every side of her and the pale blue heaven above, the night seemed doubly fair. Her soul was filled with that strange ecstasy [illegible] had once or twice felt before [illegible] she could not rightly understand.

Her pulses throbbed, her heart beat with a gentle subdued happiness. She seemed to feel Conn's kiss still upon her cheek, his arms about her, and her thoughts went back to the old days at Ballymoy, when they had lived and loved and trusted one another, with never a cloud to mar the brightness of their lives.

The party was not expected at the Rectory, the invitation having been a sudden inspiration of George himself, as, driven by ennui from the house, he had strolled aimlessly about the lawn; and when the three appeared at the open drawing-room door, heralded by the information from George that they had come to dinner, a look of annoyance darkened Mrs. Aldyn's face. It passed quickly away, however, and she welcomed her guests with her usual cold urbanity.

On the threshold of the room Madge paused, half blinded by the glare of light which met her dazzled eyes. There seemed to be candles everywhere—on the mantleshelf, on secret brackets, on the great brass candelabra which branched out from the long narrow mirrors which lined the walls. To one who had come from the air, the warmth of the room seemed oppressive, though the great French window was open to the ground to admit the evening breeze. But the sweet scents of the night were replaced here by sickly perfumes, and the rustle of the wind-swept hedges by the rustling of silks.

For a moment Madge stood quite confused; when she recovered herself and looked about her, her confusion melted into surprise. Right before her stood Conn, facing a young lady and holding

her hand in his. But if Madge was surprised, she was not more so than were those about her. When Conn, somewhat amazed himself at seeing Rosamond Leigh before him, boldly, and without a word or sign from any one, crossed the room, took her hand and named her name, Mrs. Aldyn raised her brows, the vicar dropped Mr. Dunraven's hand, and even the girl herself seemed somewhat disconcerted. After the first glance at Conn, she had drooped her eyes, hoping that he would take the hint and refrain from addressing her until they had been properly introduced. But Conn had never thought of this; as he had met Rosamond half a dozen times before, he saw no reason whatever why he should refrain from claiming acquaintance with her now.

'I didn't expect to meet *you* here to-

night,' he said, pressing her frail fingers in his strong palm.

Rosamond smiled coldly, bowed, but said nothing; she felt Conn's warm pressure with an inward sinking at the heart, and dreaded the words he might utter.

'I need not introduce *you*, I see,' said Mr. Aldyn, and Rosamond laughed lightly.

'No indeed; Mr. Dunraven and I have already become friends.'

Then Rosamond, turning slightly from Conn, found herself receiving a deep bow from Mr. Dunraven and a deep blush from Madge; for the vicar, putting his arm through Rosamond's, said:

'Rosamond, my dear, allow me to introduce you to my relative, Mr. Dunraven, and to his niece;' adding in a voice half proud, half jocular, 'this young lady is

Miss Rosamond Leigh, soon I hope to be my daughter-in-law and George's wife.'

As Mr. Aldyn finished speaking, Conn started, and his features contracted strangely; Rosamond blushed painfully, and, casting a helpless look about her, turned quickly away.

CHAPTER IV.

CROSS PURPOSES.

ALL through the dinner Madge found herself wondering why Conn had never mentioned to her the fact of his acquaintance with Rosamond Leigh. It seemed so strange that he should have been silent, Madge thought, since he had never before had a secret from her in his life. Surely the words which her uncle had uttered that night could not have been a prophesy—

being in England would surely not alter Conn and make him as deceitful and cold and reserved as most of the English seemed to be.

At this point of her reflections she looked across at Conn, who was seated almost opposite to her, and as she did so her wonder increased.

What had happened to him? His face was flushed, he talked and laughed in a loud and almost reckless way, and there was in his eyes a look of bold defiance which Madge had never seen there before. What was the matter with him?—even now she could not understand, but she felt a strange misgiving beginning to creep about her heart and make it sick and sad. She glanced at the other faces, but as she did so Mrs. Aldyn and Rosamond rose, and she was obliged to follow; so she cast a last

lingering look at Conn and passed from the heated into the cooler room.

When Madge found herself alone in the drawing-room, away from her uncle and Conn, and George Aldyn, who, despite his numerous faults generally put her at her ease, she began to forget her doubts about Conn in her own discomfiture. She had always felt uncomfortable in the presence of Mrs. Aldyn; never from the first had she been able to bear that lady's calm, cold gaze unflinchingly; but Rosamond was more courageous, and assumed when addressing even Mrs. Aldyn an almost patronising tone, which that lady did not think fit to resent.

'Why, Mrs. Aldyn, you never told me you had a niece here,' she said, as the three passed from the dining-room.

'Nor have I, dear,' returned Mrs.

Aldyn. 'Madge is Mr. Dunraven's niece.'

'Ah well, it's the same thing, I suppose,' said Rosamond; then, turning to Madge, she held forth both her hands. 'Will you not shake hands, Miss Dunraven?' she said. 'I do hope you mean to like me—and be friends!'

From each human creature that she met, Rosamond demanded at least the show of sympathy; all must add their little tribute, let it cost them what it might. Even gentle Madge could not be allowed to pass on without offering her homage as the rest had done. And the homage was readily given; that frank, spontaneous movement of the girl, and the hearty extension of the hands, called forth an immediate response.

'Indeed I shall be very glad to like you,'

said Madge, quietly giving her hands in return.

Then Rosamond, gently putting Madge into a chair, sank upon the cushions of one beside her, and, opening her fan, began to waft a soft current of sweet air about the two; while she rattled on with an easy flow of conversation, which soon enchanted Madge and put her quite at her ease. Rosamond had a marvellous power of pleasing when she chose, and that night she seemed to be putting forth all her fascinations; so that Madge, who was quite unused to such fluency and self-possession, was altogether dazzled.

Presently coffee appeared, and with it lounged in George Aldyn. Rosamond, looking past him, gazed upon the figures which were just behind. First came the rector, then Mr. Dunraven, whose bright

eyes were brighter than usual with the wine that he had taken since the ladies had left the room; and lastly came Conn. Rosamond settled herself more comfortably in her chair and glanced complacently at the empty seat on her right hand; but, to her surprise, Conn walked deliberately past her and sat down on the ottoman by Mrs. Aldyn's side.

Assuming an air of complete indifference, and forcing a smile into her face, the girl turned gaily to Mr. Dunraven, and while talking pleasantly to him, strained her ears to hear what Conn was saying.

Had she known less of Conn she might have thought, as did some of those present, that the wine which he had taken at dinner had somewhat muddled his brain, for he talked extravagantly, laughed wildly; and

whenever Rosamond addressed him, he either cut her short or did not reply to her at all. At last, to the girl's infinite relief, some one proposed a little music, and, catching eagerly at the proposition, Rosamond turned to Mr. Dunraven and asked him what he would like.

He smiled good-humouredly.

'Troth, I don't think I've got much of a choice, my dear. Can you play an Irish jig?'

'Oh yes, several!'

'Then if you'll play one, mavourneen, you'll please me. 'Twill bring back the thought of old times. Madge darling, do you remember the merry nights we had in the kitchen at Shranamonragh? 'Twill brighten us all up to hear the dear old tunes.'

Rosamond sat down to the piano and

played one or two lively airs, turning her head now and again to gaze with a smile into Mr. Dunraven's animated face, or cast a furtive, pleading look towards Conn.

'Mr. Dunraven,' she cried, 'won't you have a dance—or do you reserve that amusement for your own lawn? I should so like to see you dance a jig.'

Mr. Dunraven needed no pressing; although Mrs. Aldyn frowned, the rector shook his head, and George Aldyn, shrugging his shoulders, pulled his moustache in mortified pride, the old gentleman rose to his feet, and, taking Madge's hand, danced with more spirit than many a younger man. But the dance did not last long; in about five minutes more he was leaning back in his chair, gratefully inhaling the breeze from Rosamond's fan.

'Oh, I do like those Irish dances!' she

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'Oh, I do like those Irish dances!' she

said, as she bent smilingly above him; 'but of course these rooms are too warm for them. We must have a dance on the lawn one of these days, only I shall stipulate that I am to be your partner, Mr. Dunraven.'

Mr. Dunraven smiled with delight, and patted the soft cheek that was so near to his.

Immediately the dance had ended, Madge had approached the open window to get a breath of air. Ever since the entrance of the gentlemen, she had scarcely uttered a word, but her eyes had followed Rosamond's movements with a vague feeling of distrust.

Why was she so anxious to please her uncle? why did she cast such eager pleading glances towards Conn? and above all, why was Conn so excited and wild,

and almost rude to her? It might be all right and straight, Madge thought; it might be that she was attaching undue importance to the artless coquetries of the English girl, but the contemplation of them certainly made her uneasy, and spoiled the quiet enjoyment of the night.

She stood now half hidden behind the window-curtain. Before her stretched the garden, dotted with its shrubs, trees and flower-beds; there was not a rustle of a breeze anywhere, but the air was cool, the night was serene. Madge stepped out upon the grass, and turned her wondering troubled face to the silent sky. How still the night was, how calmly refreshing the cool and subtle-scented air! Madge thought it the sweetest hour of the twenty-four, as she walked gently about the lawn with her hands crossed behind

her, her face raised and receiving the full flood of light from the harvest moon. What she would have liked just then would be to creep away and walk alone along the deserted lanes, for she loved solitude at all times, and that night it seemed to her to be doubly dear. However, that was not to be thought of; so, after a quarter of an hour's walk upon the lawn, she began to think of returning to the room. She had made one or two steps towards the French window whence she had issued, when she suddenly paused. She saw that she was not alone; the charms of the early autumn night had drawn forth another as well as she, and there he was—for it was a man—standing in the laurel walk. Madge thought at first that it was George Aldyn who had come out to find her and take her back to

the house. She shrank back. Then the moonlight fell prone across his path, lighting up as it did so the face and figure of her cousin Conn. Madge's heart leapt with joy; she was about to run forward, to name his name, when her step was stayed. Another figure stood before him —a figure about which his strong arms were wound, upon whose ear his words were falling—words which made Madge turn sick and giddy and almost gasp for breath.

CHAPTER V.

'SPIRAT ADHUC AMOR.'

WHAT Madge saw, what she heard, she could not for some time clearly comprehend; she was only conscious of standing there silent among the shrubs, and watching the two figures passionately embrace, hearing burning speeches fall from Conn's lips, and low trembling sighs and hysterical laughter from Rosamond Leigh, who was his com-

When at length the mist cleared

from her eyes, she saw that Conn, with his arm around his companion's waist, was making a movement as if to re-enter the house.

But Rosamond laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

'Stay for one moment,' she said hurriedly. 'I am so flushed, and I tremble—just see how I tremble!' and she held up her delicate hand. 'I could not face them now; they would suspect something, I am sure!'

'And what if they do, Rosamond?' said Conn, in a low deep voice.

The girl drew back with a shudder, as if she too were awakening from a dream.

'Oh, I would not have them suspect anything of this for the whole world!' she exclaimed.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

"My [illegible] what are you afraid of?"

A quick convulsive quiver passed through the girl's frame. Her five minutes of bliss had passed away, and she began to perceive what would be the result of her mad wild words. That when she had encouraged his passion she had been fascinated by his handsome face and had felt a wild wish to draw from his lips some words of love in return, she knew now; and having gained her wish, having drawn the quick [illegible]nfession from his soul, felt the burning [illegible]es from his lips, could she calmly let

him go? She felt that one word from her would settle all. Should she utter that word and end it?

Conn bent down, and, taking her in his arms, kissed her fondly.

'Rosamond,' he said gently, 'tell me what is it that frightens you so?'

The girl fixed her eyes upon his face.

'Nothing—nothing,' she said quickly. 'I—I am not afraid—but—will you promise me one thing?'

'Anything, my darling!' cried Conn, impetuously, while the blood rushed back to his face, the fire darted from his eyes.

'Not to say one word about this to-night; not to tell any soul of what has passed between us until I bid you; not to bring trouble upon me by any rash act of yours.'

'Bring *you* trouble, Rosamond? don't I

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] her paralyzed limbs refused to move. She saw the figures pass silently among the edging of turf that skirted the gravel walk, moving away until they were lost in the darkness, and still she stood with her eyes fixed wistfully upon the gathering shadows

which veiled them from her sight. How oppressive the night seemed now!—how clammy the touch of the breeze which brushed her burning cheek! Her heart was throbbing madly, her brain whirled wildly round, with a sob she drooped her head and covered her burning face in pain. The riddle which before had been so inexplicable to her was solved at last. She knew that she had loved her cousin, and that she had loved in vain.

Five minutes later Madge raised her head and looked about her again. What must she do? where must she go? Impossible to return to the house now—to appear in that glare of light and come face to face so soon again with Rosamond and Conn. They would be certain to notice her troubled look; and if they questioned her, she would be sure, by some inexperi-

[illegible] Besides, one kind [illegible] might bring [illegible] her lip was quivering, and it cost her a great effort to repress [illegible] She crossed the lawn quickly, sought out a quiet seat which was [illegible] the trunk of a lime-tree, and sat down.

How quiet and peaceful was all the scene around her. The moon which had been ploughing its way through soft masses of white cirrus paused now in a round hole of blue just above her head and poured its rays upon her and the tall trees swayed with a gentle susurrant motion. Her boots were quite wet with the dew from the grass, her hands were cold as ice. Her breast began to heave, a half-stifled sob escaped her lips; so, quickly deserting her seat, she passed out of

the Rectory grounds and hurried home alone.

When, an hour later, Mr. Dunraven and Conn reached home, they found Madge looking flushed and feverish, sitting near a blazing fire.

'Why, Madge,' cried Mr. Dunraven, 'what made you run away and leave us, mavourneen?'

'I had a headache, uncle,' returned Madge, quietly, 'and I was very tired besides.'

'Tired, were you, and little wonder, mavourneen; they're quare kind o' people over there, and not likely to suit the likes of us. Why, that pretty creature from the Castle was worth them all!'

To this Madge made no direct reply; she only took her candle and announced

her intention of going to bed. As Conn was not in the room, she called 'good-night' to him, but she did not wait to receive his customary kiss.

CHAPTER VI.

MADGE CROSS-EXAMINES.

ON the fifth day of her stay at the Rectory, Rosamond brought her visit to an abrupt termination and returned to Rigby Castle, to await her guardian's return. This sudden departure caused some consternation at the Rectory. Both the rector and his wife, believing that their son's coolness had driven the girl away, blamed him accordingly, and some angry words passed. So after dinner was

over, George was glad enough to escape from the house and smoke his pipe alone. He did not stay in the garden, but, passing through the village, strolled leisurely towards Dunraven's house. When he drew near he was conscious of a figure leaning with folded arms upon the gate, and the next thing he saw was the upturned face of Madge Dunraven, bathed in the placid rays of the moon.

He raised his hat, then held forth his hand, and he noticed that when he took hers it was as cold as clay.

'Are you tired of life, Madge?' he asked, holding her hand in his.

'Why?'

'Because you seem to be doing your best to bring it to a close. Why are you standing without hat or shawl on a chilly night like this? Armstead is famous

for its agues and other ugly physical phenomena!'

'I did not feel the night cold, and I was dull in the house. My uncle has gone to the village to settle some business, and Conn has not yet come home.'

'Then since you have nothing better to do, perhaps you will take pity on me?'

'How?'

'Just get your hat and shawl and take a moonlight stroll; there is no better time of the day to see the country. Will you come?'

'Yes, if you like.'

So two minutes later Madge stood passively in the hall, while George Aldyn wrapped a shawl carefully around her, after which he took her hand, drew it on his arm, and the two walked away together.

For a time they walked on in silence,

choosing instinctively the narrow, deserted lanes which wound amid the moonlit fields. Madge was the first to break the silence, and she did so by a question, the downrightness of which caused her companion to start.

'When are you going to marry Miss Leigh?' she asked.

After the first surprise was over, George Aldyn answered coolly enough, prefacing his reply with that hard, cynical laugh which Madge had not heard for some time before.

'At no very remote date, I presume. When a man is once condemned to capital punishment, they don't wait long before they execute the sentence!'

'Do you think God will bless such a union as that?'

'To tell you the truth, Madge, I don't

think He'll have much to do with it. That old superstition about marriages being made in Heaven has quite gone out of date.'

For a time Madge was silent. When she spoke again, it was to return to the old theme.

'Does Miss Leigh know that you don't really care about her?'

The young man laughed awkwardly.

'You have such a plain manner of coming directly to the point, Madge, that you sometimes make me feel abashed!'

'Nevertheless, it is the truth; if you cared one bit about her you would not talk of marriage as you do.'

'Pooh! I look at things philosophically, that is all; and I suppose Rosamond is quite aware of the fact. She's a sensible

girl, and regards these things in quite as matter-of-fact a way as I do myself. Why, if my father only happened to lose his money, and I my prospects of rising in the world, she'd throw me over to-morrow.'

'She would?'

'Of course she would. And, between ourselves, I should think her a fool if she didn't.'

'And you are going to marry her!'

'Precisely! and a very happy couple we shall be. You shall come to see us, Madge, after the first year, when you'll acknowledge, I am sure, that my principles are sound.'

In her excitement during this conversation, Madge had forgotten her shawl; it now fell to the ground.

As George lifted it and wrapped it gently around her again, he noticed that

her frame was trembling violently, that her lips were quivering, her eyes full of tears.

'Are you angry?' he asked eagerly, allowing his hand to remain for a moment on her shoulder as he wrapped the shawl around her.

Madge shook her head.

'But you are,' he persisted; 'I can see it in your face; and see, the tears are already dimming your eyes. Madge, what strange fate is it that always comes between us? It is my luck never to please you; nay, I sometimes think that you almost hate me—and yet, I would sooner lose my right hand than give *you* a moment's pain.'

Madge raised her face to his.

'I know you are kind, and indeed I am not angry. Good-night!'

They had wandered back to their starting-place, and as Madge spoke she held forth her hand. George Aldyn took it in both of his.

'You are determined to go in? you will not stay a minute longer with me?'

'No, indeed I cannot. My uncle will be home soon, and he would be sorry not to find me there before him.'

He pressed her hand gently in both of his, and gave her a silent good-night. He did not turn from the gate, however, until several minutes after the door had closed and shut the girl from his sight.

The village street was deserted that night, so as George Aldyn walked back towards the Rectory gates he gazed abstractedly at the placid sky and almost uttered his thoughts aloud.

'Heigh-ho!' he murmured, 'can it be that my nature is changing, or am I bewitched? Why is it that my lips won't utter the words that will bind me irrevocably to Rosamond; and more mysterious still, why is it that, almost in my own despite, my feet will bring me to Madge? If the child had remained with me five minutes longer to-night I should have kissed her pretty quivering lips and asked *her* to marry me, and no doubt repented of my folly before the morning! The governor is right; I'm not fit to marry a penniless girl. The sooner I'm bound to Rosamond the better; and yet ... Madge, my darling,' he added, turning to gaze at the house which sheltered her, 'why did you ever come to Armstead?'

Meanwhile Madge, having reached the parlour, sat down in the firelight to think

over the interview which had just taken place. Ever since that fatal night only a week before, when chance had possessed her of Conn's secret, her soul had been sorely troubled. True, Conn had told her all, and she had possessed the fortitude, though her own heart was almost breaking, to listen calmly to his tale of love. But he had made her swear to keep his secret as he was keeping it, as Rosamond wished it kept.

When she had first seen George Aldyn that night she had hoped that Rosamond, acting upon the impulse which any modest girl would feel, had told him all. But now she knew that this was not the case. Despite George Aldyn's sarcastic words, she felt that he had uttered the truth; he evidently regarded Rosamond as his future wife, and her soul misgave her to think that he should be so deceived. If

she could only speak! But she knew that she had been sworn to secrecy, and that, come what might, she must keep her word.

CHAPTER VII.

'DON'T GO OUT TO-NIGHT, CONN.'

AND Madge did keep her word, though she felt that matters were growing worse each day.

After Rosamond left the Rectory, Conn was seldom to be found at home. All day he was at his work, and in the evening he went forth again, ostensibly to amuse himself with gun or rod, but really to have secret meetings with the girl he loved.

That it was not altogether a happy time for Conn, Madge knew, for she watched him narrowly. His temper grew fitful, uncertain, while over his face there was stealing a look of harassed querulousness. Madge's secret, too, began to weigh upon her, and she began to feel that sickening sense of dread which tells of calamity at hand. She knew that each day the aspect of things grew blacker; that Conn continued to hold secret meetings and assignations. Though the rector and his wife still looked forward to the marriage of their son, and though she had pointed out the inconsistency of all this to Conn again and again, he would do nothing. Rosamond still wished their secret kept, that was enough for him. So Madge was forced to hold her peace and watch, and feel the dull sense of danger deepen each day.

At length, however, her anxiety for Conn overcame her, and she spoke again.

It was one afternoon when Conn, going through the usual formula of taking his gun beneath his arm, was preparing to leave the house. Ere he reached the door, however, Madge met him, and laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

'Conn,' she said gently, 'do not go out to-night.'

'Why not, Madge?'

'Because—well, I think you ought to tell my uncle your secret before you meet Miss Leigh again.'

'Tell my father!' exclaimed Conn, in horror. 'Why, the news would be all over Armstead before to-morrow night!'

'And suppose it was,' returned Madge. 'I don't see the harm. This state of things cannot go on for ever; and if Miss

Leigh cares for you as you say she does, she would not wish to keep you both in such a false position.'

Conn flushed nervously and turned his head away, for the words which Madge uttered so quietly seemed like an echo of his own thoughts. How often had he not begged Rosamond to put an end once and for all to this debasing secret—how often had he not told her that if her love was steadfast and true, she would boldly acknowledge it before all the world and let him take his place by her side. And yet her will was law to him. She had coaxed when he sulked with her, wept when he stormed, and finally succeeded in making him promise to be silent.

'It is not nice to have such a secret, Conn,' Madge continued quietly, 'especially from my uncle, and such ways of

going on never lead to any good. I have never been properly comfortable since I have had to keep the secret too.'

'Well, Madge, I promise you I'll tell my father—but not to-night.'

'Why not, Conn? Every day you put it off makes it worse. If you had been all fair and honest at first, it would have been better still.'

'I suppose it would,' said Conn, absently; and as he spoke he began to move away.

'Then you mean to go out to-night, Conn?'

'Yes. I'm going now. Good-night, Madge,' he added, kissing her trembling lips. 'I expect you'll be in bed before I come back again.'

He passed out of the door and walked across the lawn towards the gate, Madge walking silently by his side. When they

reached the gate she raised her eyes to his and pressed her cheek against his hand, while Conn wound his arm around her and drew her closer to his side. For the moment Madge felt that the two were standing as years before they had been wont to stand, on the black moorlands of Ballymoy.

'Good-night, Conn!'

'Good-night, Madge!'

Then he released her, and, passing through the gate, walked swiftly away.

When he had gone a few paces along the road, he paused, turned slowly round, and looked back. There stood Madge just as he had left her, her arms folded upon the low white gate, her dark eyes fixed imploringly upon him, as if entreating him to return. If he had only paused and walked back then—back to the happy

home which had been his so long, to her whose wealth of kindness it seemed he was never to know! But it was not to be. That magnetic influence, which for weeks had lured him on either for good or ill, was still upon him, and it had now grown too potent for him to resist. So, with a last wave of the hand to Madge, he turned away, and, with his gun swung carelessly over his shoulder, passed quickly down the lanes and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONN GOES TO THE TRYST.

WHEN once he was freed from Madge's gaze, his footsteps lagged; he seemed to forget his surroundings and live only in his own thoughts. Various expressions distorted his face, as the various emotions rose and died in his troubled soul. Several peasants passed him, hurrying home from their labours; one or two gave him a gruff 'good-night,' but he stared

vacantly in their faces and answered nothing. Presently his progress was arrested: the slight figure of George Aldyn stopped his way.

'It's well there isn't a river or a pit before you, or I verily believe you'd walk into it! Why, you look like the first murderer—or the last! May I ask where you are drifting off to in this aimless way?'

Conn's thoughts had carried him so far away, that it took him a few seconds before he could collect himself sufficiently to reply.

'I am going over to the warrens to shoot a few rabbits.'

'At this time of day! See, it's near sunset; before you can reach the nearest warren, it will be growing dark. I should say it's something more than

rabbit-shooting that takes you out to-night!'

George Aldyn spoke good-humouredly; but Conn did not notice the tone, he only heard the words.

'Suppose it should be,' returned Conn, hotly. 'What is it to you?'

George Aldyn shrugged his shoulders.

'Nothing,' he replied coldly. 'Good-night!' and he passed on.

Conn stood for a moment in the middle of the road. His first impulse was to call his cousin back and apologise for his incivility; but the fear, which was ever present with him, of involving Rosamond in some trouble, restrained him, and he held his peace. But the meeting had made him nervous; this night of all nights he wished to be alone. So he clambered over the bank which shut in the highway,

and sauntered slowly through the fields, where he thought he should be uninterrupted.

But fate seemed against him that night. He had not wandered far across the fields when his progress was again arrested.

'Beg pardon, sir,' said a rough-looking man, touching his hat, 'but this here ground is preserved.'

'Well, and if it is, what is that to me?' said Conn, rather irritably.

''Tis a good deal to me, sir,' returned the man, sullenly; 'we've got strict orders to prosecute trespassers.'

'Well?'

'It's my duty to take your gun and your name.'

The man put out his hand to take the gun, but Conn stepped back.

'Not so fast, my good fellow. Are you one of Lord Rigby's keepers?'

'Yes.'

'Well, you ought to know that I've got permission to shoot rabbits in his warrens.'

'Oh, I beg pardon, sir; but if you'd just keep near the warrens you'd save a deal o' trouble. They lie nearly a mile up there.' Without another word, Conn walked away, while the man stood and stared suspiciously after him.

'Queer time o' night to start for shootin' rabbits,' he muttered; 'seems to me there be somethin' more nor rabbit-shootin' that's worrying him. I didn't like his look —I'm d——d if I did. It may be all right and square, but I mean to keep my eye on him;' and he followed slowly in Conn's path.

He kept a good distance behind; but Conn, walking swiftly forward, never once turned his head. After he had gone some distance his steps lagged again, his eye grew vacant, his face troubled. The scene around him changed as he passed on. Evening was fast melting into night, and the crimson glow of the sunset, which bathed the distant village, faintly tinged the rugged hillocks and now almost leafless trees which surrounded the warrens. Conn paused, and gazed abstractedly before him—at the burnished ferns, crisping and curling up at the chilly touch of autumn; at the swelling hillocks, riddled like honeycomb; at the gleaming banks of sand which appeared here and there by the river's side. Then he placed his gun against a mound, and, folding his arms upon a wire fence which was before him, stood

like a statue. So silent was he, and so intense was the stillness which reigned around him, that one or two rabbits began to peep cautiously forth from their holes; then, catching sight of the figure, they either scuttled back again, or, venturing boldly forth, galloped for refuge among the ferns.

Still Conn did not stir, still his gun lay useless by his side, but the keeper, standing some fifty yards away, watched each moment more intently for some sign.

'I thought he was arter no good,' he murmured. 'Rabbit-shootin' indeed! why he might have popped off half a dozen on 'em sitting before this, if he'd had a mind to. Should like to get a good look at his face, blowed if I shouldn't—might be useful by-and-by.'

He walked cautiously forward; he had only gone a few yards when he stumbled against a stone. One or two young inexperienced rabbits, which had boldly sat nibbling the grass which grew at the mouth of their holes, quickly disappeared. Conn started, and, catching up his gun, turned hastily round.

'What the deuce are you watching me for?' he asked, angrily.

'Beg pardon, sir, but I warn't watching you,' said the man, frightened and stepping back.

'Yes, you were. Come, be off! I want to be alone.'

'I've as good a right to be here as you, sir. I'm the keeper o' this preserve.'

'I don't care who you are—I won't be followed about.'

The man, muttering sullenly beneath his

breath, slunk away. When he had disappeared, Conn heaved a sigh of relief.

'Pooh! I'm as nervous as a child to-night. These secret meetings unhinge me, and make me see an enemy in every soul I meet! I wish to God it was all over, for her sake and mine!'

The last gleam of sunset had faded, darkness had followed, throwing a gloom upon all the land. There were no stars, and the young October moon was as yet covered with black masses of drifting cloud. Conn stood, looked keenly around him, and listened. No one seemed abroad; not a sound, save the sighing of the breeze among the trees, struck upon his ear. He shivered, for the night air was chilly, and, buttoning his coat around him and taking his gun beneath his arm, moved slowly away.

At first he stumbled along, his path was uneven, and dense darkness had come on; but soon the clouds, drifting slowly apart, revealed the moon, and its light, falling upon the fields before him, dimly lit up his way. He passed through meadows, wet and cold with dew; over corn-fields, laid bare by the harvest scythe, until he came to the verge of a wood which lay between him and Rigby Castle. There he paused, looked keenly around again, and listened. Still he could neither see a soul nor hear a sound. He kept his gun beneath his arm, and, pacing up and down the grass, crushed the burnished leaves beneath his feet. Now and again he paused; looked and listened—starting and trembling at every sound. Presently his heart gave a throb, his hands began to tremble, and a word of welcome escaped his lips. A

tall figure, cloaked and hooded, emerged from the darkness which lay so dense around him, and, passing lightly and swiftly over the grass, stood like a ghost before his face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRYSTING-PLACE.

A STRONG arm clasped about her frail waist, a shower of passionate kisses upon her lips; such was the greeting which Rosamond received from her secret lover now—such was the greeting to which she tremblingly submitted that night. For one moment her fair head rested on his broad shoulder, her lips met his; then she shivered and withdrew from his embrace.

'We must give up these secret meetings,' she said; 'every time I see you I grow more afraid!'

Conn's arms were impulsively extended again, but she stepped quickly back and eluded his grasp.

'Do not touch me, pray!' she said, nervously turning her head away. 'Do you know, I begin to fear we are watched. As I came here to-night, walking stealthily by the riverside, I several times fancied that I heard noises, then light footsteps, but I could see nothing. Oh, I am terrified!'

'But not of me!' said Conn, reaching her with one stride. 'Just a word and you shall go. Now you have given me leave, I'll come to-morrow and claim you before them all.'

The girl's heart gave a great bound.

After all she was a coward, for as she stood there so pale and calm, she felt as if her life-blood was ebbing slowly away. She knew, before she uttered those words, that Conn would interpret them thus: she had determined when the time came to give the death-blow to his hopes, yet now she lacked the moral courage to do what she knew to be inevitable.

'Do listen to me,' she faltered, trembling again, as if from the touch of the wind, which smote her pale cheek and then went sighing away among the trees; 'you do not understand. I cannot see you at the Castle any more than I can see you here. Lord Rigby must not know——'

She paused and looked appealingly in his face. But he was silent. Did he understand? It seemed to Rosamond that

he did not, for in his eyes still shone that passionate fire which she had now almost learned to fear.

'Why are you so afraid of Lord Rigby?' he said. 'He can't forbid your marrying me. The most he could do would be to give you no money, and I have never calculated upon your getting that, from the first.'

The girl laughed hysterically.

'Ah, that is just it!' she said; 'if all this came out I should get nothing. You are so poor—and—oh, it would never do for me to marry a poor man!'

'Not with love to sustain you?' asked Conn, softly. 'I would go in rags for your sake, my darling!'

'Ah! but I am afraid poverty would never agree with me!' interposed Rosamond, quickly. 'Oh, Conn, if you would

only reflect, you would know it would be far better that—we—should——'

'Well, Rosamond, go on,' he said: and as he spoke, he gazed into the girl's face with such a look as made her faint with fear.

'Let me go!' she exclaimed, struggling in his embrace like a snared and frightened bird. 'Conn, have your lost your senses? Listen to that!' she cried, as a low whistle came from the heart of the wood behind them; 'look at that shadow moving on the riverside! Oh, for heaven's sake let me go!'

Still holding her firmly in his arms, Conn turned and followed the direction of her frightened gaze. On the riverside, a few hundred yards away, the moonlight fell, revealing a figure or shadow, which crept stealthily along the bank.

The vision was only momentary; a broken cloud, drifting over the moon, obscured the light; a low, clear whistle was distinctly heard again; then it mingled with the sighing of the wind. For a moment Conn's heart misgave him; then he turned lovingly to the girl.

'Don't be afraid, Rosamond,' he said; 'if they were to pass here they couldn't see us; it's so dark now. My God!' he exclaimed suddenly, as he felt the girl withdrawing from his embrace, 'are you afraid of *me?* Why do you shrink from me like that?'

'Because I *am* afraid of you,' returned the trembling girl. 'Yes, it is true. You say you love me, and I believe you do; and yet I sometimes fear that your love, strong as it is, would easily turn into dislike—even into hate!'

'Never!'

'Not if I married—some one else?'

'You mean if you threw me over?' exclaimed Conn, tightening his hold of her waist. 'If such a thing as *that* were possible, God only knows what I might be tempted to do!'

As he spoke the moonlight illumined his face, and Rosamond saw that his features were contracted with passionate pain. She turned her head away, a smothered cry escaped her lips. Just then a tongue of flame shot up from the river's bank; it flared, illumined their faces for a moment, then died away. As it did so, a drift of clouds flying up from the west, passed over the face of the moon, and plunged the scene in darkness. But almost immediately two other lights shot up as if from the earth, and a wild red glow pene-

trated the blackness. It flashed upon the river—it disclosed more shadowy forms; then it faded again, leaving all blacker than before.

Rosamond stood trembling and heart-sick.

'Did you see those lights?' she whispered, as again she tried to free herself from her lover's arms. 'I was right—there are people abroad, and they will find us here together!'

But Conn's arms clasped her more tightly.

'If I let you go when will you come back to me? I can't live on these stolen meetings—say that I may come to claim you!'

'No, no; you must not! Oh, look! there is another light! I am sure those people are coming this way! For pity's sake let me go!'

But Conn persisted.

'Tell me that you will meet me again to-morrow night. Tell me that——'

He started; the girl uttered a low suppressed cry, and tearing herself free from his arms, hid her face and sobbed.

The church clock chimed ten, and as it did so, the wind swept up from the valley and struck the trees, the air seemed full of voices and strange, mysterious sounds.

'Rosamond,' said Conn, soothingly, 'don't cry. I will do whatever you wish, my darling.'

'Let me go!' cried Rosamond fiercely, pushing his hands aside; then suddenly shrinking back, she exclaimed: 'Look there again! look! look!'

A glare of light again shot up in the distance. It flared up for a moment, then

being beaten down by the wind, it illuminated the glittering river, the grass on its banks, the shadowy forms of men. As Rosamond gazed, speechless now and terror-stricken, other lights shot up, until the air was ablaze with crimson beams; shadowy figures moved hither and thither, like spirits in an Inferno.

They crawled along the grass like reptiles; then two forms entered the water, standing there with the bright light burning around them; they splashed wildly at the water, while black figures on either side of the bank walked along the grass, dragging something with them.

As Rosamond watched this proceeding she felt cold with dread.

'They are coming this way. I will run until I reach the Castle.'

But Conn caught her again.

'One word, Rosamond. If I promise to keep away from the Castle, you'll come soon again?'

'I cannot—that is—let me go! See, they are coming nearer and nearer!'

Ere she could conclude her speech she was startled again. A shrill whistle sounded in the distance, a prolonged shout followed. In a moment the torches were flung hissing through the air, and falling into the river, were instantly quenched. Sounds of loud voices were heard; then came the sharp report of a gun. A human shriek, sharp, prolonged, and full of pain, rent the air, then died leaving all silent.

CHAPTER X.

CONN IN TROUBLE.

FOR a moment Conn stood as if chained to the spot; then, unable to gain another glimpse of Rosamond, he hastened away to the place whence the sounds had proceeded.

The night seemed brightening again. The clouds had sailed on before the high wind, and the moon shed a full, calm light upon fields and woods. It lit up Conn's path, and cast heavy shadows around him.

Stay—were they shadows? Was that only the wind which shook the trees and rustled the burnished leaves upon the ground? Once or twice Conn paused—suspicious that figures were moving past him, conscious of shuffling footsteps on the grass. He spoke softly, but no answer came. All was silent.

Suddenly, however, he felt a hand placed on his shoulder; another moment and he was in the custody of two strong men.

'Here he be!'

'This way, lads—'tis the very man we're a-lookin' arter!'

'Why, what's the matter?' asked Conn, amazed. 'Who fired that shot just now?'

'Likely *you'll* be able to tell us that [illegible]er a while!'

Utterly amazed as to what it all meant—bewildered by the darkness, the suddenness of the encounter, the strange words of the men—Conn suffered himself to be dragged about a hundred yards along the river-side.

There he paused. Close to his feet knelt two other men, who held torches in their hands and supported between them a recumbent figure, the figure of a man: splashed with mud, drenched with water, gasping for his last breath!

His white hair, wild and dishevelled, was tossed about his forehead; the blood was flowing from the chest and saturating the clothes which covered it; while his livid lips muttered slowly words which none could understand.

'My God!' said Conn, as he stared

fixedly at the agonised face and watched the quivering form. 'Can't you get some assistance—don't you see the poor fellow is dying?'

The sound of the voice seemed to rouse the torpid faculties of the dying man. He opened his eyes and stared fixedly into Conn's face. His pale lips opened as if to speak, but ere he could utter a word his features grew rigid with pain. With a groan he threw up his arms in the air, and fell back without a sign of life.

Conn shuddered.

'He is quite dead!' he almost whispered.

He had scarcely uttered the words when a hand was placed on his shoulder, and a voice said fiercely:

'*You* must come along with us!'

'Of course I will, if I can be of the

slightest use,' said Conn; 'but what are you going to do with the unfortunate man?'

'That's our business. Leave *him* alone — we've got to settle up with *you!*'

As the words were uttered, a distorted face was thrust up to his; and Conn recognised Scott the keeper.

'With *me?*' he replied; 'why, what have I got to do with it?'

The man laughed with the ferocity of a mastiff on the chain.

'Don't bandy words wi' me, you —— scoundrel, or by God I'll strangle you! Who's in power *now*, you mischief-making cur? Boys, drag him along—hold him down—stun him if need be! As sure as there's a God in heaven he shall swing for this night's work!'

In a moment the terrible truth seemed to dawn upon Conn; he staggered back like a drunken man.

'Great God! you never can think that I fired that shot! Your own sense ought to tell you better than that! It must have been one of the poachers who were out on the river to-night. I saw them netting the water by the light of their own torches.'

The keeper uttered an oath, and shook his fist in Conn's face.

'It's a lie!' he exclaimed. 'Who but you had any motive for shooting his lordship?'

'His lordship?' exclaimed Conn, more bewildered than ever; 'why, you don't mean to say it's Lord Rigby?'

The furious face of the keeper again appeared before him.

'Yes,' he said; 'and John Scott, Lord Rigby's keeper, will see you hung for it—he will, by ——!'

For a few moments Conn stood petrified, utterly unable to utter a word; his eyes fixed upon the face of the dead man, looking ghastly and awful in the faint moonlight; his senses vainly trying to grasp vividly the terrible situation in which he found himself.

For a moment the figures about him faded, a sort of mist obscured his senses; he saw only the faint moonlight lying upon the land; he heard only the sighing of the wind among the trees and along the rolling river at his side. A hand placed roughly on his shoulder, a voice sounding in his ear, recalled him to himself.

He wildly shook himself free.

'Let me go! You'll not swear my life away in this fashion! I tell you I was two hundred yards from here when that shot was fired!'

''Tis a d——d lie!' said the man, securing him firmly. 'What might you be doin' there at this hour of night?'

'Never mind,' said Conn, setting his teeth; 'do you think I'm going to account to you for all my actions? Let me go — or by God you shall rue it!'

He shook off the man's hand, seized him by the throat, and cast him like a straw upon the ground. In a moment half a dozen hands were laid upon him, he was roughly seized and bound, while curses and blows rained upon him, and by the

light of the moon he saw many savage eyes glaring into his. Unable now to raise a finger to help himself, he was swiftly dragged away.

CHAPTER XI.

A MOMENT REST.

FOR some time after Conn had passed from her sight that night Madge stood with folded arms upon the gate watching the spot whence he had disappeared: then, as the air was biting and very chill, she returned to the house, and, shivering, sat down beside a bright clear fire. The house was empty save for herself, and she expected to be many hours alone. Her

uncle, she knew, would not return till late; while Andy and Biddy, whose monthly holiday it was, had gone to the neighbouring market-town to witness the humours of an English fair.

What could she do to make the hours pass? Sit and think?—no, she could not do that; the future was so clouded, the past so full of regrets for her. As this crossed her mind, she shivered and held her hands nearer to the fire. A dog lay at her feet, a great clumber spaniel, which in the old days at Shranamonragh Castle had belonged to Conn. Since it had come to England, the dog had grown fat, asthmatical, and half blind, and had consequently been committed to Madge's care. As she bent near to the fire, the animal raised its head and whined.

'Poor old Grouse!' she said, stroking his

silken coat; 'even you have your troubles. England does not seem to agree with any one of us. Ah, if we had only stopped at home!'

She rose, walked about the room for some time, then she drew an arm-chair up near the fire, turned up the lamp, took up the first volume of Banim's 'Crohure na Bilhoge,' and began to read. She had sat thus for a time, and had just finished the terrible description of the murder of the Doolings, when the whining of the dog again disturbed her. Dropping her book upon her lap and turning in her chair, she saw him pattering restlessly about the floor, and scenting the air of the room. For a moment the impulse came upon her to rise and bolt the doors, then she sank back half ashamed of her fear.

'If they choose to walk in and steal,

they must!' she said to herself. 'I have learnt a good deal since I came to England, but I do not think I could bar the door against any one in the world!'

So, commanding the dog to lie down, she returned to her book, and was soon again entranced in the tale.

How long she had sat thus she did not know; suddenly she leapt to her feet with a low cry of fear, and her heart began beating violently. In the middle of the room the dog stood, barking and whining; hurried footsteps crunched the gravel without; then, to her horror, a white face was pressed against the window, its eyes fixed wildly upon hers! For one moment the face, distorted, horrible in its ghastly pallor, gleamed from the outside of the glass—then it faded. But only for a

moment; the next, the front door was thrown violently open, and a wild figure, staggering in, fell powerless at Madge's feet!

In her terror at the suddenness of the ghastly apparition, Madge gave a shriek. As she did so, the figure struggled up and seized her wrist.

'Hold your tongue!' hissed a hoarse voice in her ear, and the girl, turning her terror-stricken eyes upon the man, recognised him. It was he whom she herself had been instrumental in saving from the brutality of the crowd of roughs—the same who only a few months before had rested at her uncle's fireside the body to which no others would give shelter.

Curiously enough, as Madge recognised him, her fear abated. She was used to strange human figures; they had filled all the

foreground of her childhood; and that this one should come again like a famished wolf was a matter to her of small surprise; it only vividly recalled the memory of her Irish home. How many a wounded famished man, like the one now trembling before her, had crept across the threshold of Shranamonragh Castle, certain of receiving kindness and help from within! How many a bleeding wound had been bound by hands trembling with pity; how many a famished body had been snatched from the grave, already yawning for its dead! Scenes like this had been but common occurrences in her early life, and the memory of that time lent her a strength which sustained her now. Thus it was that, standing in a position which would have filled the mind of an English girl with suspicion, terror, and distrust, Madge

gazed upon the man, her eyes filled only with growing pity and surprise.

As she did so, she saw that his brow was gashed and bleeding, and almost involuntarily she held forth her handkerchief to stanch the bleeding. But it was roughly pushed aside, and the man drew his hand across the wound, staining the fingers red with blood. The fierce face, the wild movements of the man, re-awakened Madge's fear.

'What do you want?' she asked, shrinking away from him. 'There is nobody at home to-night. I am all alone.'

'Alone? yes, of course you're alone,' he returned; 'I found that out before I came in. And now I *am* here,' he added, suddenly changing his tone, 'd—— me if I don't have something to drink! Come, be quick! give me some brandy!'

As Madge turned to leave the room, glad, it must be confessed, to find means to escape, the man suddenly barred her way.

'Stop!' he gasped.

'What are you doing? What have you come here for to-night?' she cried in desperation, as she saw him close the window-curtains and lock the door. 'If you do not go, or let *me* go, I will cry out for help.'

Ere she could utter another word, however, the man's heavy hand was placed over her mouth, and she was roughly forced into a chair.

'Keep quiet,' he whispered in a husky voice, 'unless you want to be the death o' me, and I don't believe you're one o' that sort. You saved my life once!'

'Did I?' returned Madge, scarcely

knowing what she said, but wondering what next the man would say or do.

His conduct was curious. Hugging his clothes about him, and shivering, he walked over to the fire, crouched down upon the hearth, and held his hands over the blaze. As he did so, crimson spots seemed to gleam upon his fingers. He suddenly pulled his hands away, and began, with a dark, nervous scowl, to rub them on his coat.

During this performance he turned round and looked at Madge who sat, white, trembling, and silent, as he had placed her, in a chair.

'No,' he said, as if communing with himself, '*you* wouldn't have the heart to bring a poor devil to the gallows! I thought I should be safe here when I crept in—and safe I am!'

He turned round to the fire and again commenced to warm his hands; then he looked over his shoulder half slyly but fixedly at Madge.

Suddenly he started up, and his whole face grew almost livid with anguish.

'Hark to me, my good girl,' he said; 'they're looking for me out there, and if they get me, as sure as there's a God above, I shall swing. But I don't mean to let them lay a hand on me. I shall hide myself here, and if anybody comes to *you* arter me, say you never set eyes on me—d'ye hear?'

Madge did not reply, but in her fear she cast an agonised look towards the fastened door. The man saw the look, and his brow contracted.

'What's that? You'd call them that want me, and set 'em on me, would you?'

he said. 'You'd bring a poor, half-starved fellow-creature to the gallows, though he never did you a stroke of harm!'

'God forbid!' returned Madge, fervently. 'Sure, I wouldn't bring harm to any one if I could help it, for all the world!'

The man turned round and gazed at her intently from beneath his shaggy brows.

'Are you a Roman Catholic?'

'Yes.'

'Then what you swear you'll stick to; so just to make all safe,' he added, setting his teeth as he spoke, and suddenly picking up a small bronze crucifix which lay upon the table, and holding it out to her with a half-savage, half-supplicating movement—'you'll swear it on this here cross.'

'Swear!' repeated Madge, recoiling in terror; 'what am I to swear?'

'Speak low! Swear that if they follow me here, or if they come after I'm gone, you won't betray me—you won't say a blessed word to any soul on all God's earth about seein' me this night. Come, swearing's easy—swear!'

As he spoke he grasped the crucifix, and again thrust it towards her. His white face grew whiter, his features worked convulsively, his ears seemed to be on the strain, listening for a sound, and he kept glancing towards the door.

'Quick, I tell you!' he said, as Madge stared at him in silence. 'What do you look at me like that for? I don't want to lay a hand on *you*, my girl; but I mean to save my own neck. You'll swear, or, so help my God, I don't answer for what I'll do! I don't mean to let *you* hang me, mind that!'

'I understand!' returned Madge, with terrible calmness. 'I will try not to bring you any harm, but I will not swear. Tell me, what have you done?'

'What's that to you?' he questioned, with a strange, far-away look. 'But suppose it was murder—what then?'

'Murder?' cried Madge, shrinking back in terror; 'if you have committed murder, God help you!'

'Much o' that!' muttered the man. 'He never helped me before, and I don't fancy He'll begin now. But there,' he continued nervously, seeing Madge shrink and shudder more than ever, 'I was only joking—don't you be afraid, my girl! 'Tis only some one that's badly hurt. Curse him! he made my life a hell, and he's only got what he deserved.'

As the man spoke, his cheeks grew ashen

grey, and the look in his eyes made Madge, despite his assurance, turn faint with fear. The blood trickling in a thin stream down his cheek went drip, drip upon his breast. Again he smeared his hand across it and wiped it on his coat; his thin frame began to shiver as he looked at the girl.

A dead silence followed his speech—a silence broken only by the loud ticking of the clock in the hall. Oh, if some one would only come! thought Madge. God only knew how that interview might end!

The man stood looking fixedly at her for a time, then, as if reading her thoughts, he burst into a low laugh.

'I'm not fit to be let loose, is that it?' he said. 'No, of course I'm not—it's the old cry. But what about them as drove

me to what I've done, and made me what I am? Why there ain't a soul in this God-forgotten hell-hole of a village who'd give me shelter and a bit o' food if I was dying. But that ain't no crime! Look what a hunted devil I am. They've put me in quod—they've tried to kill me inch by inch, but so help me God they shan't hang me! I wasn't born for that!'

Then he again held forth the bronze crucifix and said:

'Now then, look sharp—swear!'

But Madge still shrank back.

'I tell you I will not swear!' she said. 'What harm have I ever done to you, that you should frighten me so to-night? If you will but go away and leave me in peace I will try to shield you—I will promise that—but I will not swear!'

As she spoke her hands trembled

violently and she felt almost suffocated with the quick beating of her heart, but she still possessed the courage to stand and gaze steadily at her companion. He was not looking at her now; his wild eyes were fixed upon the curtained window, his ears were strained to catch a sound without. Suddenly he seized Madge by the wrist and spoke hoarsely in her ear.

'Look here,' he said, 'I don't want to do *you* any harm—I said so; but when a poor devil's life's at stake 'tis another matter. After all, I may have killed my man to-night. If I'm caught I'll swing. There's only *you* to speak against me—so swear, or it will be worse for you! Swear!'

What was that? As he ceased speaking Madge heard a sound as of faint footfalls on the gravel walk without.

'Oh, do not ask me to do that!' she cried, piteously. 'I will let you hide—I will not tell that you are here—I promise to say nothing! Oh, listen!—they are coming!' she added in a half shriek.

What followed seemed confused and unreal; through a dim mist she saw the wild blood-stained, contorted face close to hers. In his excitement the man waved the crucifix in the air, then with a sudden movement pressed it against her lips; the next moment he was gone.

Whither he went Madge did not see; but as he passed out of the room the cloud which had obscured her brain cleared away, and she became conscious for the first time that the dog was whining and yelping, and that some one was knocking violently at the outer door. She rose quickly and fled to open it. Three men stood without;—

who they were Madge could not tell. She moved back for them to enter, she could not open her lips to ask what they wanted. One stepped forward and asked for 'the master.'

'He is not at home,' answered Madge, faintly; 'they are all out to-night—but me!'

'Hast seen a man pass hereabouts?'

Madge trembled, and a cold hand seemed passed over her hair.

'I have not left the house this evening!'

'There's been bloody work up there to-night, and we're arter them as did it. Thought we seen one on 'em come this way, and we followed; but happen he's given us the slip. Good-night, mistress—better lock up your door again and make all safe!'

Madge said nothing more. She walked back into the parlour. She felt that her hands were beginning to clasp nervously, the lights to fade before her eyes; then her aching head whirled wildly round, and she saw and heard no more.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TROUBLE GROWS.

TEN minutes after Madge had closed the door of the cottage, Conn, a silent prisoner, was led past the gate. Since his hands had been bound he had not spoken a word, he had scarcely been able to think; but the sight of his father's house recalled him to himself, and he began to wonder what was going to be done with him. He looked at his escort—six men. Who they might be

he did not know: it was too dark to see their faces distinctly. He looked at his hands: they were well lashed with cords. He was utterly powerless: he could not knock his escort down: he resolved to try what fair words would do.

When, therefore, he came to the low white gate, where, shortly before sunset, he had taken a last look into Madge's eyes, he paused. The men closed round him, and tightened their hold of his shoulders.

'Well,' said Conn, impatiently, 'where are you taking me to?'

'Where you'll be safe enough, I'll [illegible] cords and let me go,' [illegible]ly attempting to wrench [illegible]. Then, inwardly cursing [illegible], he added with

forced calmness, seeing the men close on him like fierce bull-dogs: 'Deal like men by me and you shan't suffer. As sure as there's a God above us, I'm as innocent of this crime as any one of you. See, my people are sitting up for me; you may lock my own door on me if you like, and in the morning I'll come forward and make all clear!'

As he spoke, he extended his hands for the cords to be loosened, but the men only gripped him tighter and urged him a few paces on.

'You may as well come along quiet; we doan't mean to let ye go!'

'All my promises are nothing, then?'

'Noa.'

'Do you think I want to run away?'

'Likely enough!'

So saying, his captors closed more de-

terminedly around him. He was obliged to walk on farther and farther from the gate, and see the light in the window grow fainter, then fade entirely away.

They were taking him to the police-barracks.

The police were all astir, for a fleet-footed messenger had been despatched by Scott to get aid, and to leave word that one prisoner, then on his way, was to be lodged in the strong-room till dawn. That prisoner was Conn. On reaching the barracks he was at once taken to the strong-room and locked safely in.

When at length he found himself alone, he sat down to think. But he could hardly shape his thoughts; confused pictures flashed through his brain and dazed him; everything seemed dreamy and unreal.

When they went to him in the morning, they found him sitting dressed upon the side of his bed, his elbows resting on his knees, his head supported in his palms. During the struggle with the keepers, on the night before, he had got a few hard blows about the hands and face, and now the blood was dry; his coat had been torn too, and his face was very pale. When told that he was to be taken before the magistrate, he acquiesced readily enough; but before going he carefully washed off the dried blood and tried to make himself look presentable.

A conveyance was waiting at the door, and in this, Conn, handcuffed and guarded by two policemen, was placed and driven away. He did not ask whither they were going now; he did not seem to care. He held his handcuffed hands low down

between his knees, and every now and again he shrank back in his seat as if he feared to be seen.

It was very early; scarcely any one seemed astir; the lanes through which the carriage passed were almost deserted; the windows of the houses were curtained, the doors closed. The weather had changed. The wind still blew bitterly, but a thin rain was steadily falling from a dark and dreary sky; soaking the jet black flag which might be seen hanging listlessly above the towers of Rigby Castle. Everything looked cold and desolate and grey, and there was a sense of sad oppression in the air, as if from the icy hand of death. They might have taken the handcuffs off Conn then; he would not have raised a finger to get free. His own danger, his own ignominy, were all forgotten at sight

of that black flag which he had seen above the Castle towers.

For the first time he seemed to realise what all this meant to Rosamond. *She* was alone now! The man whom she seemed so much to fear was dead; there could be no obstacle to their marriage —none but this hideous accusation of murder, and that she, with one breath, could easily dispel.

The thought passed like fire through Conn's brain, and as it did so, his cheek flushed, his eye brightened, he seemed to become a new man. When at length the carriage stopped, he looked up with a dark smile in his eyes and on his lips, and, despite his handcuffs and escort, stepped forth into the air with his usual erect carriage and firm tread.

He had been conducted to the foot of

a flight of stone steps which led to a mansion. Everybody seemed astir here, and the strange visitors were evidently expected. As they alighted, the great oaken doors were thrown wide, and Conn, still closely guarded, was solemnly conducted along a polished oaken hall, hung with tapestry, through curtained archways, and finally ushered into a room where several other people were already waiting.

One of these individuals was Scott, the head-keeper. He was standing by the fire holding a newspaper in his hand. When the room-door opened, and the prisoner was ushered in, the keeper looked up, an angry frown contorting his whole face, and his eyes met those of Conn. But only for a moment; Conn quickly turned his head away, and taking his stand by the window, waited patiently for what

was to follow. Five minutes later carriage-wheels were heard coming up the drive; they stopped at the foot of the front-door steps; almost immediately the room-door opened and an elderly gentleman—the master of the house in fact—entered the room, followed by his servants.

Conn recognised him in a moment. He was a large landed proprietor in Armstead, and one of the county magistrates. To save time he had ordered the prisoner and witnesses to be brought to his own house, in order that the case might be looked into. He was a man of about sixty; cold, hard, and grim, and his face that morning looked colder and harder than ever. He had just come from Rigby Castle, where he had been inspecting the dead body of its lord. As he entered the room he cast a sharp scrutinising look into the face of the

prisoner, then he took his seat at a table and prepared to go into the inquiry.

Conn told his story clearly enough.

He had got permission to shoot on Lord Rigby's ground, and had gone out the night before with the intention of killing a few rabbits. This had led him to the river. There, darkness had overtaken him; he had seen the poachers at work, he had heard the shots fired, and while making his way along the riverside to discover what it all meant, he had been seized and accused of murder.

So far so good. His statement was taken down, read over to him, and he signed it. Then Scott, Lord Rigby's head-keeper, was called.

He said that for several weeks past Lord Rigby's preserves had, in spite of his keepers, been poached every night;

that at length his lordship had grown desperate, and hearing that on a certain night a raid was to be made on the salmon river, he had determined to go out with the keepers, to watch the water, and if possible arrest the poachers. Thus they had gone forth fully armed; they had concealed themselves among the trees of the plantation, and from their hiding-place had noted the arrival of the men and had been enabled to see them, by the light of their own torches, engaged in netting the pools. At a given signal they had sprung out—a frightful scuffle had ensued, blows were exchanged, then two shots were rapidly fired, and Lord Rigby uttered a scream and fell.

'Did you see the prisoner amongst the poachers on the river?' asked the magistrate, and Scott answered hesitatingly:

No, he could not recognise any of the men, for they wore black crape over their faces, and their figures were all more or less disguised. He had every reason to believe that the prisoner was employed to keep watch on the bank, gun in hand. He was in the habit of keeping bad company, and might have been constantly seen in the society of a criminal who had been formerly sentenced for trespass in pursuit of game, and who a few months ago had been released from prison and had returned to Armstead.

When Scott's deposition was read over and signed, another witness stepped forward. Conn looked hard at the face, but though it seemed faintly familiar he could not recognise it. However, when the man began to tell how he had met him on the preceding evening stealing across the fields

—how he had stopped him, then followed and watched him, Conn remembered all in a moment; a cold sweat burst out upon his forehead, and he began to tremble. But not altogether for himself. He thought also of Rosamond. If this boor had seen him meet her, if he had listened to their love scene, how would the report of it affect her? But again, if he had *not* seen her, so much the worse for Conn.

The man's evidence was most damaging. He swore that Conn had not been shooting that evening—*i.e.* not at the rabbits. Conn swore he had not fired a shot; the gun produced contained two empty cartridge-cases; when they had been fired it was impossible to say.

The case was a serious one, and Sir John Grassmere conducted it with grim severity. After entering a little more

fully into particulars, questioning the w
nesses again, he thought the evide
strong enough to warrant the commi
of the prisoner. Conn was thunderstru
but he made no comment. He saw n
that words would be useless. So
allowed himself to be removed from
house and hurried off to Gresham gaol.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISIT OF CONDOLENCE.

A COUPLE of hours later, when day had fairly dawned, the news of Lord Rigby's murder and Conn's arrest was ringing through Armstead, spreading consternation far and wide; and ere the hands of the church [illegible]nted [illegible], the great bell in the [illegible]s [illegible]lemnly for the dead. [illegible] [illegible]rder brought with it [illegible]an sorrow, for Lord

Rigby had always been a hard man, and the poor upon his estate had sometimes had cause to long for the day when he would give place to a more generous master. When, following close upon the fatal news, came the other announcement that Conn's was the hand which struck his lordship down, the consternation became great indeed. No one who heard the news for a moment doubted the truth of it. Indeed, it seemed to some of these clouded brains only a fitting episode in the wild life which the Irish family seemed to lead—a tragic but characteristic closing of their career since they had come within the orbit of civilisation.

There was little work done in Armstead that day; though from dawn till dead of night the village seemed to be in a state of commotion. Messengers rode con-

tinually up and down from Rigby Castle, from the towers of which waved the great black flag bearing the Rigby arms; crowds of people gathered upon the riverside to gaze upon the spot where his lordship was supposed to have fallen; and ere the shadows of night began to darken the village the grand entrance to the church was being draped in black. Indeed, so great was the commotion caused by the horrible event, that few paused for a moment to think of the small white house standing alone amidst its faded rose-trees, or to reflect that the man, whose hand it was said had struck the blow, was closely allied to the rector of the parish, Lord Rigby's nearest friend.

Meanwhile the commotion at Rigby Castle had gradually cooled down; by twelve o'clock order was somewhat re-

stored. The dead peer lay coldly silent upon his couch; the servants moved about on tiptoe, speaking in calm whispers, and Rosamond sat alone in her boudoir. She was a shade paler than usual, but exhibited no other sign of strong emotion. The remains of her breakfast still stood upon the table, though she had removed to her writing-desk and was engaged in a voluminous correspondence. While she was thus employed, her maid entered softly and announced: 'Mr. George Aldyn.'

'Let him come here,' said Rosamond, turning her back upon her writing-table, and a minute afterwards George Aldyn entered the room.

Rosamond rose as he came towards her, and extended her hand: he took it, and then quietly kissed her. As he did so, as his soft moustache brushed for a

moment the delicate cheek, the girl shivered, turned away her head, and her eyes filled with tears. There is no man so obtuse that he cannot feel self-pity; there is no coquette so heartless as not to desire affection of some kind. Rosamond's life had been a cold one: all sympathy had been placed as it were beyond her reach. It had been the life allotted to her, and she had learned to love it: she had been content to accept Lord Rigby as her parent, George Aldyn as her lover, without giving any serious thought to either. But now, somehow, it all seemed altered, and as her affianced lover politely held her hand and kissed her cheek, she could not help recalling the scene through which she had passed only the night before. Again she seemed to feel the strong arms clasped about her, the passionate kisses raining on

her lips, and for the moment her whole heart yearned to the man who had loved her with such tempestuous passion.

'He is so very handsome!' she said to herself; 'in appearance he is fit to be a king. If he were only a little bit better connected and a little bit better off, why then I think I could have made myself love him indeed!'

The sound of her companion's voice recalled her to herself. She passed her hand over her eyes as if to dispel a dream.

'Thanks,' she said, without looking up. 'You are very good, but I have done all that is necessary. I shall be left at peace for some days, I suppose, then there will be the inquest and the funeral; and then the new lord will remain in possession, and I shall be turned adrift!'

As she spoke, she smiled faintly, and

looked at her companion as if expecting him to reply. But George Aldyn said nothing. Again and again the words which he knew he ought to utter came to his lips and died.

'It is not a nice thing to be ignorant of one's identity,' continued Rosamond, still smiling faintly, but pulling nervously at the fringe which decorated her chair. 'It is all very well while one's guardian lives, but should he be carried home a corpse one fine morning, the fairy palace vanishes, and Cinderella is Cinderella again!'

While Rosamond spoke, George Aldyn watched her quietly; and as he did so, a frown overclouded his face.

'Lord Rigby's untimely death won't affect you,' he said, 'if he has had forethought enough to provide for you in his will.'

'You speak unfeelingly,' said Rosamond, quietly; 'nevertheless you are in a measure right. Rich men have no right to use their riches as a means of bringing pain to others. How do I know but what it was the most unfortunate day of my life when Lord Rigby brought me here?... I have had a tolerably happy life so far,' she continued, after a short pause, 'but where is the use of it all now? It has given me a taste for luxury which in all probability I shall not be able to indulge. I have learned to look upon this as my home. A week hence, perhaps in two or three days, I shall be shown the door!'

'Who is Lord Rigby's heir?' asked George Aldyn.

'His nephew—a man nearly as old as himself, I believe. I have never seen him, but I have heard that he too is unmarried;

so I wonder whom the lands will go to at last.'

'Are you sure there is nothing I can do for you?' he asked again, trying in vain to make his words sound endearing.

'Quite sure,' returned Rosamond, gazing sadly into his eyes; 'when you are gone I shall sit down and read, and do my best to banish from my mind the memory of last night.'

'Was it not horrible?'

'Terrible!' said the girl, with a shiver; 'it seems now to me like a wild nightmare. I was in bed when they brought him home, but I was so terrified that I rose at once and got the servants up, and we have none of us been to bed since.'

'How did he look?'

'Lord Rigby? I don't know. I have a horror of death, so I did not go to see;

but Osborne, my maid, tells me he is very placid, as if he died without suffering much pain.

For a time they were both silent. Then George Aldyn, looking quietly into her face, asked:

'Do you know who killed him, Rosamond?'

She shook her head, but her hands began to tremble, and George Aldyn thought: 'Perhaps after all she has some little pity for the man with whom she has spent her life.'

'Have you no idea?' he continued.

'Not the least! Osborne tells me it was one of a gang of poachers whom Lord Rigby and the keepers went out to surprise at their work. I don't think any one knows exactly who fired the shot.'

'But I have heard!'

'You have? Then who is it?'

'My own cousin!'

'Your cousin?' said Rosamond faintly, while her cheeks grew ghastly and her hands trembled more and more. 'Why, surely you cannot mean Conn Dunraven?'

The name came out before she was aware of it, but George Aldyn, though he appeared very much composed, was in reality too much disturbed to notice it.

'Yes,' he continued, 'young Dunraven. I was more amazed when I heard of it than ever you can be!'

'But why do you suspect *him?*' asked Rosamond, gazing now very steadily at the ground.

'I don't suspect him,' returned George, 'but he is suspected by others. At the same time I don't know but what he may have done it, things look so black. Last

[illegible]

[illegible] she said. [illegible]

[illegible] pull at the [illegible] in alarm, [illegible] what her [illegible] A copious dose of sal volatile brought Rosamond to herself again. Then she dismissed her maid and turned towards George Aldyn.

'[illegible] foolish of me,' she said; 'but these [illegible] occurring one after another, are

rather sickening. It is not a nice thing to learn that a relative of *yours* has committed murder!'

George was about to resume his seat, when Rosamond put out a trembling hand as if to stop him.

'Will you excuse me now, and—and leave me?' she asked, looking wistfully into his face.

'Certainly,' he returned, 'if it is your wish. My mother and father will be here soon—you had better lie down and rest till they arrive.' So saying, he again kissed her and departed.

When he was gone Rosamond threw herself back in her chair, and lay for a time with closed eyes and wildly palpitating heart. All her self-control was gone now that it was no longer necessary for her to play a part. Conn Dunraven arrested and

[illegible] of [illegible]—of the very murder [illegible] while he was [illegible] Nay, had it [illegible] have been [illegible] night. It was [illegible] thither, she who [illegible] and yet—suppose she spoke. Her temples were throbbing, her heart was beating, her hands and feet burned like fire. She arose, and walked with restless fitful steps up and down the room. She was not thinking—her brain was in a whirl, her heart was filled with hatred towards both God and man.

'Was there ever such an unfortunate wretch as I?' she said to herself. 'Was ever any other human being so oppressed with sorrow and shame? Lord Rigby's murder was not enough; I must suffer more!'

She walked to the window, looked over the lawns and meadows towards the spot where she had been accustomed to meet Conn; her burning brow was pressed against the cold panes of glass, and she shivered.

'Oh my God!' she cried suddenly, 'if all that should ever be known, what will they think of me!'

CHAPTER XIV.

A CRIMSON STAIN.

GEORGE ALDYN, having gained the door of Rigby Castle, mounted the horse which he had left in charge of the groom, and rode swiftly away. His eyes were bent thoughtfully on the ground; a strange puzzled expression overspread his face; and from time to time, as he turned in his saddle and glanced back at Rigby Castle, his lip curled into a slightly supercilious smile.

Presently the noise of wheels attracted his attention, and looking up, he saw his father's pair of bays. In the carriage which they drew sat the rector and his wife. As Mrs. Aldyn recognised her son, she was about to stop the carriage; but George waved his hand and passed on, urging his horse towards Armstead.

Ever since the news of his cousin's arrest had been made known to him, the one wish paramount in his mind had been to see Madge; but with that habit of self-repression which had become like a second nature, he had obeyed the stern voice of duty, and gone first to the woman who was destined to become his wife. Now, however, he was free—free to let his footsteps wander where his unfettered thoughts had already been—to the little cottage covered with its withered rose-trees, surrounded by

its blighted lawns, and exposed to the chill breezes from the autumn sky.

He trotted on quickly through the fresh morning air, scattering the mud beneath his horse's heel, and with the picture ever before him of the strange dark dreamy eyes which would soon look so sorrowfully into his; and, despite his self-control, his heart, usually so cold and calm, began to beat fitfully as he drew near to the low white gate near which he had so often seen her stand. She was not there now, however. The gate stood wide open, so did the front door of the house; and when he crossed the threshold and paused in the little hall, he felt that all within the house was deathly still.

He rapped at the door: no one came. He called Madge: there was no reply. Was the house deserted? Could it be

that they had been mad enough to go out and leave the house thus, with every door thrown wide for any tramp to enter? Yes —his surmise, extravagant as he thought it, was a true one: there was not a soul at home, though every room was open. As he retraced his steps down the stairs and through the hall, he closed every door and turned the keys; when at last he came to the dining-room, he entered with the keys in his hand, intending to lay them on the dining-room table for Madge or whoever else should come home.

On the threshold of the room he paused and shrank back, his fine sense of neatness and cleanliness repelled by what he saw. The room had evidently not been entered that morning. The hearth was grey with the ashes of yesterday's fire; the lamp which still stood upon the table was

black from last night's burning, and a faint sickly light still flickered on the glass; a couple of chairs were overturned, an open book lay upon the floor; the blinds were half drawn down as if to keep the daylight from revealing too clearly the general untidiness of the chamber.

After the first momentary pause, George Aldyn entered, drew up the blinds, lifted the chairs, and opened the window.

'That's better,' he said, as a breath of fresh cold air swept into the room. 'I think, on reflection, I'll wait awhile to see if Madge comes home.'

He stood for a time looking thoughtfully out of the window; then, growing restless, he began to pace up and down the room, pausing now and again to straighten some article of furniture which offended his orderly eye.

Nobody came: he went out to the gate, looked up the road, and down again: he could see no one.

'It's hardly worth while my waiting,' he said to himself. 'Perhaps they've all gone to Gresham to see Conn, and won't return till midnight.'

He re-entered the house, closed and fastened the window, blew out the lamp which he now saw was still faintly burning, and stooped to lift the book which lay open upon the hearth. It was a volume of 'Crohure na Bilhoge,' its leaves stained brown with age. As he took the book in his hand, his eye, travelling carelessly along the carpet towards the hearth, detected a mark which made him start.

He placed the book upon the table, and stooping, looked on the ground again. He went over to the window and drew the

blinds still higher, then returning to the spot he went down on his knee to look again. The carpet was covered with a white crumb-cloth, and the portion of this cloth which lay nearest to the hearth was stained with one or two large splashes or spots of red.

'Curious,' he said, 'that my eye should detect that to-day of all days. What can it be? It isn't paint or dye—it looks awfully like blood!'

He lit a match, and holding it over the spot, looked again. He was certainly not mistaken. The stain was there; and now, with the flickering light above it, it looked even brighter than before.

George Aldyn shuddered as he rose to his feet. He pulled at the hearthrug until it covered the spot; then he went out, closing the door after him.

Once in the open air, he seemed to breathe more freely.

'After all,' he said to himself, 'it's perhaps as well I didn't find Madge at home; for, stoic as I am, there is no knowing what she might tempt me to do!'

He walked to the gate, loosened his horse's bridle, mounted, and rode away.

The air was chill, and the prospect all around was dreary as death; the trees were drooping, the fields and meadows barren, the highroad deep in mire. His horse's hoofs plunged deep into the dark ruts as he rode, and the animal soon slackened its pace into a dismal walk. It was not late, but already the chill grey look of the sky and the shifting lights on the landscape warned him that the best part of the day was gone. For a time he rode on, how long

he knew not. He was in a dream; his brain was full of visions which he would gladly have chased away.

When at length he raised his eyes, he found that he was on the road which he had traversed so often during the summer —the road which led to the convent.

How quickly the light was stealing away! Already the crimson glow of sunset had faded, and the bright evening star was set in the pale grey sky. The fields all around were white with heavy dew; the air was growing every moment more bitter. George Aldyn leaned forward and gathered up the reins which he had allowed to fall loosely on his horse's neck, for he perceived that the animal had walked to within a few yards of the gate which closed in the convent grounds; he wheeled round quickly, and without allow-

ing his thoughts to wander again, hurried towards his home.

When he reached the rectory-gate, he cast his eyes towards Rigby Castle, and saw the death-flag still waving darkly from its towers.

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER THE SHADOW.

AT that very moment Madge was gazing at the flag too; not in horror, nor in mere pain, but in a dazed overmastering stupefaction. Her face was white as death; but though the air all around her was very cold, and the ground upon which she stood was soaked with rain, her hands and brow were burning at fever-heat.

'God help me—tell me what I can do!'

that was the prayer which for the hundredth time her bloodless lips gave forth—that had been the cry of her heart ever since the moment when she heard that Conn was accused of murder, and knew that one word from her lips would set him free.

That she knew the murderer of Lord Rigby she did not for a moment doubt. It could be no other than he who had crept that night into the house like a wild hunted beast, and had made her swear upon the cross not to betray his secret.

Madge turned her eyes from the flag, and gazed despairingly around her. To her the world seemed in a mist; but ever before her vision loomed that face, white, haggard, and blood-stained, with the wild eyes gazing into hers as if imploring mercy. And she had sworn upon the cross!—with

the cross pressed against her lips! That oath!—that oath! It seemed like Conn's death-knell ringing in her ears; it seemed to be drawing all the life-blood from her own heart.

On first hearing the news of Conn's arrest, she had stood like one struck dumb; then when the truth, or something of the truth, dawned upon her, hope had suddenly succeeded fear, and her terrified features had grown calm. But even at that moment the remembrance of her oath passed across her mind and turned her heart stone-cold. He—that man—was the guilty person, but she had absolutely sworn never, by word or deed, to reveal her knowledge of the fact.

With a low moan she had crept from the house out into the open air, and had gazed around her, vaguely searching for help.

Thus she had wandered aimlessly from lane to lane, from field to field; she had dreamily watched the flag of death waving from the Castle towers; she had seen the rector's carriage drive swiftly past her, the people congregate about, gossiping of the deed which had been done; but not until the lengthening shadows of night began to darken the landscape, did she realise that she had been many hours from home. Presently she felt that she was bitterly cold and growing faint for want of food, so she wearily turned her steps towards the road which would lead her home.

When she reached the cottage, she found that her uncle was there before her. She had seen him that morning start off with a face full of love, and in his mind some wild plan of setting his son free. But now Madge saw with anguish that

all hope was fled; he sat by the fireside like a broken man, with his head bowed, in the very excess of his despair. She stood upon the threshold silent from very shame. How could *she* say a word to comfort him?—was not hers the hand which was bringing him all this grief? The very feeling which had kept her from going to Conn withheld her now, when she felt impelled to rush forward and throw her arms around the old man's neck.

The old blind spaniel which had been wandering about the room, scenting sorrow as it were in the air, and whining piteously, came suddenly to a standstill by Madge's feet, and gave a cry of welcome.

Then Mr. Dunraven raised his head, and seeing Madge, stretched forth his arms towards her.

'Mavourneen, mavourneen, don't cry!'

he said soothingly, when in a wild paroxysm of grief she had thrown herself into his arms. 'Madge, Madge, there's a God above us that'll never let them harm Conn!'

'Did you see him, uncle?' asked Madge, between her sobs.

'Yes, darling, I saw him,' he answered, with a shuddering sigh.

Madge shivered too, and clutched nervously at her uncle's hand. Oh, if she could but speak! for she felt that this sorrow was breaking her uncle's heart, and uprooting the happiness of the little home which was so very dear to her. But the words froze upon her lips, for before her vision again loomed that face, and in her ears rang again that heartrending cry for mercy: '*You* wouldn't have the heart to bring a poor devil to the gallows! I'm safe

[illegible] No, she had not the [illegible] instinct of self-pre-[illegible] which in his hour of need had led [illegible] murderer to her, had not [illegible] it was safe. Though [illegible] was almost breaking, she [illegible] would destroy [illegible]

[illegible] sat [illegible] on the hearth, her [illegible] on her uncle's knee, [illegible] his, her fearless [illegible] upon the fire. She [illegible] her mind was too con-[illegible] Sometimes she found her-[illegible] heartbeat the [illegible] in the hall, or listening [illegible] the servants in the kitchen, the footsteps in the hall; her head [illegible] and a strange feeling [illegible] had crept over all her limbs. . . .

The hall-clock chimed twelve, and as it did so, Mr. Dunraven rose and insisted that she should go to bed. He himself was to be up early in the morning to see a solicitor about Conn.

'The boy must be defended,' he said. 'Sure enough he's innocent, Madge; but the judges and all the lawyers are rogues, and not one of them will ever believe the truth, till some other rogue that's well paid tells it them.'

Mr. Dunraven tried to speak hopefully, and yet in his heart he had secret misgivings which troubled him sadly. For in thinking over the interview of that day he had wondered again and again why it was that Conn had turned so pale when he had asked him innocently enough what had brought him so near the fatal spot at all, and what he was doing when he heard the

[illegible] question, [illegible] guilty, [illegible] conversation to [illegible]

[illegible] was determined not [illegible] to Madge: she [illegible] heart [illegible] was so struck by her [illegible] strange lustrous look [illegible] she should not [illegible] Biddy was called and ordered [illegible] beside that of her young mistress.

The mental entitlement as well as the great bodily fatigue of that day, had completely worn out Madge: nevertheless she lay for hours looking at the window, thinking of all that had happened since last she lay there, listening to Biddy's restless moanings and turnings, and inwardly

praying for sleep. At last it came, but only to bring with it dreams more harassing than were her waking thoughts.

When she awakened it was broad day. Her hands and brow were still burning feverishly, but she now felt able to think and act more like a rational being. She rose, dressed hastily, and then fell to thinking what it would be best for her to do. Suddenly she remembered with a pang that since the dreadful blow had fallen upon them not one of their relations had been near. Even George Aldyn had kept himself apart. Could they believe Conn guilty? Had they hearts of stone, that they could show no pity for him now that he was in prison, accused of murder? The girl's heart turned dead within her.

'I don't think Mr. Aldyn would mind if we were all in our graves,' she said,

[illegible]

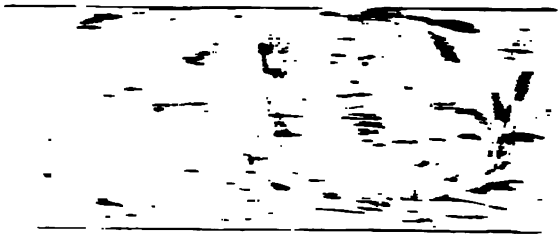
[illegible] differently of [illegible]

[illegible] and with a [illegible] the stairs.

[illegible] Mr. Dunraven [illegible] hours before, [illegible] of intense stillness, [illegible] seems to bring, reigned, [illegible] over the house. And [illegible] as if Death had already [illegible] here. There, in the [illegible] in a corner [illegible] while on the gravel walk [illegible] Foam, his pet grey-hound, sniffing the air incessantly, and uttering little impatient whines as if to call back his master. It was a lovely morning. A hoar-frost had touched the earth over night, but now the sun was putting forth faint rays, and these, creep-

ing up the little gravel walk, just lit the threshold of the cottage, then paused trembling, as if afraid to enter. For a moment Madge stood in the hall, opening her pale lips to inhale the refreshing air, then with a sigh she turned away, pushed open the sitting-room door and entered. As she did so, a figure rose from a seat in the window and approached her with outstretched hands.

'Thank God you have come at last!' said a voice, the sound of which sent the warm blood pulsing through her heart, and the next moment she found herself standing by George Aldyn's side.



[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] here for [illegible] Madge. [illegible] quite for- [illegible] and taking [illegible] face. I [illegible] at first but at last [illegible] nearly drove [illegible] a quarter of an hour longer I believe I should have actually [illegible]nded the stairs and begun knocking at

your bedroom door. No!' he added, in answer to her wild look of inquiry, 'I have no news for you. I only wanted to see you, that was all, and to know if I could be of any use.'

He paused, but Madge said nothing; her heart was too full for words. She was glad that he had come. She liked to hear his voice, and, now that she was in trouble, to feel the strength of his presence. But she could not say so; she could only stand mutely before him, and allow her hands to lie clasped passionately in his own.

'Madge,' he said at length, wondering not a little at her strange silence, 'won't you trust me? won't you let me do something for you, now that you really are in need of help? I know you think me unsympathetic—so I am as a rule—but I can feel for *you!*'

[illegible] spoke he bent his head slightly to [illegible] her, and Madge, meeting his eyes, [illegible] heart give a slight flutter, and her [illegible] cheek flush. She gently withdrew her [illegible] from his, and began quickly and [illegible]ishly to unload her heart of some of [illegible] trouble. She felt a relief in talking, and [illegible] a moment she forgot the awful oath [illegible]ch was casting such black shadows [illegible]t her. George Aldyn was the inno[illegible] cause of recalling it.

'When did you see Conn last?' he asked, [illegible] length; and Madge, quite unsuspicious of the hidden meaning of his question, replied quietly:

'On Tuesday evening when he went off [illegible] warrens. I leaned upon the gate [illegible]atched him go down the road.'

'And didn't he come back after—at [illegible] I mean?'

'No; he has never been inside the house since! Why do you ask?'

'Because when I came here yesterday, and walked about the room for a while waiting for you, I saw a stain upon the drugget which has haunted me ever since. Look! there it is still. If I were you, I would have it washed out—it looks exactly like blood!'

As he spoke, he pointed towards the hearth, and Madge, turning her head slowly and following with her eyes the direction indicated by his outstretched hand, fixed her gaze upon the large crimson stain which still stood out vividly upon the white ground of the floor-cloth. As Madge looked upon it in silent fascination, the sunlight creeping through the window just touched it with its warm rays. The blood seemed to pulsate and brighten until it

burnt the spot all around. Still fascinated, still powerless, she continued to gaze on, feeling as she did so a sickening sensation of faintness and fear beginning to creep over her, till suddenly the tension of her nerves relaxed, she covered her eyes with her hand, uttered a cry, and fell trembling into a chair.

With slowly increasing wonder, George Aldyn had watched the gradual changes in her face. As she sank into the chair, he bent above her and lifted one of her hands. It was as cold as stone.

'Madge,' he cried, 'what have I done? Good God, what is the matter?'

The sound of his voice seemed to reassure her; with an effort she rose, and, extending towards him her cold trembling hands, said passionately:

'If you have any care for me, save poor

Conn!' Then she covered her face with her hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

For a time George Aldyn stood by in silence, and allowed her tears to flow unrestrained; but as soon as the violence of her grief had abated, he sat down beside her and tried to soothe her pain. Madge could not see his face; her eyes were still covered by her trembling tear-stained fingers; but his words brought her comfort, and when at length he left her she had grown quite calm. He had promised to do his best for Conn, and he meant to keep his word; nevertheless, as he walked away from the cottage, and reviewed in his mind the scene through which he had just passed, he could not help feeling a little bitter.

'For friendship's sake she might have

confided in me,' he thought. 'But there —perhaps it is better as it is. I'll do my utmost for them now, and if Conn gets free, Madge and I must shake hands and say a last farewell!'

That same night, when the clock in the church tower was chiming forth twelve, a man stood alone among the fields, his heavy eyes turned towards the sleeping village of Armstead. It was very quiet all around him, and the darkness was dense, save now and then when the black clouds opened up and showed glimpses of the rainy moon. It had been fine during the day, but towards nightfall rain had again come on, and it still fell softly, soaking the tattered garments of the man, and making him shiver to the bone.

'Just my luck again!' he murmured,

rubbing his sleeve across his face to wipe away the blinding rain. 'I declare to God I'm the unluckiest devil on the face of the earth. It wasn't enough for me to be hunted and kicked about like a dog, but I must kill my wrong man, and get that Irish lad into trouble into the bargain. That's the d——st part of it all, because *she* knows; and *now*, as sure as there's a God, she'll tell. If I stop in Armstead I shall swing, that's clear enough; and I don't mean to swing, not even for such a swell as his lordship!'

He paused suddenly, stood for a moment listening, then, falling upon the ground, lay like a snake in the grass. The moon drew across its face the thick veil of cloud. The bitter breath of the night air was blown upon the earth. It ruffled the sleeping pools, bowed the thin branches of the

[illegible] when
[illegible] he crept
[illegible] fixed his eyes upon
[illegible] grey towers of Rigby Castle, which

were faintly indicated by the tremulous rays of the moon. Then, when the darkness descended again upon the earth, he moved on straight towards the shrubbery which enclosed the Castle grounds. Having gained the verge of this, he paused again, and stood with his trembling body resting against a tree.

He was very wet by this time; the water dripped from his hair on to his shoulders, and made his clothes cling about him with a touch so clammily cold it seemed like the grasp of death.

'Lord Almighty!' he muttered, 'this ain't the life for a man. I shall be found dead in a ditch some fine morning, and sometimes I kind o' long for the last of it. But I won't die on the gallows, that's flat!'

He crept forward and passed silently through the shrubbery. Having gained a spot where he could see the Castle, he paused again. All was not darkness here. From several windows in the Castle faint flickering rays of light were issuing, while across the blind which covered one window a shadow was occasionally thrown. Upon this window the man fixed his eyes, and as he gazed he muttered to himself, stopping occasionally to brush the back of his hand across his forehead.

'It was a cursed shot that brought down old Rigby—now the poor little woman will be left alone! Well, he's got no more than he deserved: *he's* done murders enough, only they didn't happen to be hanging ones. He only broke poor folks' hearts, and they don't punish such as him for that. Poor little woman! I

wonder whether she knows! Well, it don't matter much now. I must make myself scarce, but I thought I'd like to have one last look at her window before I went away.'

As he spoke he tremblingly drew back and concealed his body amid the thick foliage of the trees. The window-curtain on which his eyes were fixed was slowly drawn up, the window opened; and Rosamond, clad in a white dressing-gown, with her golden hair falling loosely upon her shoulders, leaned out upon the sill.

From his dark nook among the trees, the man could see her well. The light which burnt brightly in her chamber showed him her golden head and marble-like face, and the soft white drapery which clung to her throat and heaved with the gentle heaving of her breast. For a

CHAPTER XVII.

MADGE VISITS THE CASTLE.

AS Madge lay in bed that night an idea occurred to her which she determined, as soon as day came, to carry into execution. It was to go to Rosamond Leigh, and ascertain from her, if possible, what Conn was really doing at the time of Lord Rigby's murder. It was with the sole intention of meeting Rosamond that Conn had left the house that night; if he had met her—if he had

been with her or near her at the time when the murder was committed, what could be easier than for Rosamond to speak and set him free? Madge never for a moment imagined that Rosamond might refuse to speak, even if it were in her power, the words which would release her lover from prison, and perhaps rescue him from death. She knew it would be a trying ordeal for a young girl not yet twenty years of age—who had hitherto been regarded as immaculate—to have to make public the fact that, while openly bound to one man, she had secretly carried on a flirtation with another, her social inferior—nay, more, that she had met that other at all hours of the day and night in secret desolate places. But when such grave issues were at stake it was another matter, more particularly since the stain which she had allowed to sully her

character could be immediately effaced by marriage.

It had more than once occurred to Madge that Rosamond's main object in keeping her relations with Conn a secret, had been the fact that she did *not* wish to marry him. She had ceased to think that now, since she was of opinion that the girl had gone too far even to wish to retract. It was not possible, she thought, for a girl, no matter how much she might be infatuated by a handsome face, to do as Rosamond had done, to receive from a young man passionate avowals of love, and to allow him all a lover's privileges, without finally consecrating the relation. Believing this, Madge had a strong hope that Rosamond, by speaking the truth, could and would be the means of setting Conn at liberty.

[illegible] since that [illegible] had stood [illegible] poor [illegible] of [illegible] for wishing [illegible] Rosamond though quite [illegible] on a secret [illegible] with positive [illegible] with his [illegible] while Madge was eager to hold [illegible] whom she regarded as her [illegible] But now that was all over. [illegible] as she had watched the gradual deepening of her cousin's love for the beautiful English girl, she had felt the gradual fading away of her own passion; and that now she would be able to offer her hand in all sincerity to the woman who was likely to become his wife. Yes, she would meet Rosamond as a sister—as

sisters they might mourn together over their common woe.

She started late, though she had to walk the whole way, and the distance was not short; so that when she reached Rigby Castle the day was well advanced. As she drew near to the great turreted building which contained the body of the dead peer, she felt a cold trembling creep through her which made her soul sick. When she entered the Castle door, she was shown by the footman into a spacious room, spanned by gilded arches and draped with crimson hangings—a chamber which to her eyes seemed splendid beyond measure. She looked around, nevertheless, upon the gloomy grandeur with eyes as sad as if she were examining the interior of a royal tomb. The footman withdrew at once to announce her, but for a long

time Rosamond did not appear. The announcement that 'Miss Dunraven' had called, and begged for a private interview with Miss Leigh, gave to that young lady's nerves a shock which it was difficult for them to recover.

At first she had been inclined not to see Madge, and to plead as her excuse the sacredness of her great sorrow, but a moment's reflection proved to her that such a line of conduct would be indiscreet.

'After all,' she reflected, 'who was Miss Dunraven, that a girl so shrewd and worldly-wise as herself should shrink from her in fear?'

As far as Rosamond could remember, Madge was simply a stupid-looking country girl, who sat tremblingly silent in the company of her social superiors, and

seemed to be utterly overcome if those elevated beings happened to forget their high estate and to treat her as an equal. Rosamond had not forgotten how Madge, who was almost entirely ignorant of even the common usages of society, had on one occasion left the Rectory without having the grace to say one word of adieu; and a few days after, when, in riding through Armstead, Rosamond had happened to meet her, the girl had stared so stupidly at her and her horse, that she had almost neglected to return the smiling and very gracious bow which Lord Rigby's ward condescended to bestow upon her. It had always been a matter of wonder to her that Conn, who was, she thought, both physically and morally their superior, could endure his daily intercourse with such very ordinary beings.

Whatever might be Madge's motive in calling at such a time at Rigby Castle, Rosamond could not imagine; but as it was evidently expedient that she should see her, she determined to do so with a tolerably good grace.

She would not honor Madge with an interview in her own private apartment. As soon as she felt herself tolerably composed she descended to the spacious and richly-furnished drawing-room, where her visitor was still awaiting her. Madge rose when the door opened and seeing Rosamond, stepped forward to meet her. As she did so, Rosamond paused, and coldly bowed her head. Then she saw at one glance that her speculations had been wrong. The timid low-bred country girl [illegible]n she had so despised no longer shrank [illegible]e her, but stood in calm strength,

fixing upon her with strange intensity her large sorrowful eyes. Rosamond was glad to feel that at this moment, through the very excessiveness of her agitation, her own eyes filled with tears; she was not sorry that her hand trembled and turned as cold as stone.

'Miss Dunraven,' she said, in a low tearful voice, still not attempting either to step forward or offer her trembling hand, 'may I ask what has brought you *here* to-day? I must confess I was startled when I heard you were awaiting me; this is the first time I have seen a stranger since Lord Rigby died—and you——'

Here she paused, trembling with unmistakable aversion. Her strange repelling manner amazed Madge, while her evident distress moved her to pity. She drew back the hand which at Rosamond's

entrance into the room she had quietly extended towards her, and said in a low voice:

'I have come to ask you what you can do to help my cousin Conn?'

'Your cousin?' repeated Rosamond, with lips as white as her white cheeks; while Madge continued in the same tone, still with her dark eyes fixed upon her companion's blanching face:

'Yes. My cousin was arrested two days ago; he is in prison now. They say he murdered Lord Rigby, but you know that what they say is false!'

She paused, as if expecting her companion to reply. But Rosamond was silent—so silent, so moveless, she seemed suddenly to have turned to stone. She heard her own heart beating, she heard the clock which stood upon the marble

mantelpiece ticking with a faint far-off sound; she heard the low sighing of the wind as it crept through the open window, rustled the heavy velvet curtains and passed on. She opened her cold lips, but she could not utter a word.

'Do you not understand?' continued Madge, pained and puzzled by the other's silence. 'That night when Lord Rigby was murdered, my cousin happened to be close to the very spot where he fell. They arrested him and accused him of the murder—but of course he is as innocent of that deed as either you or I!'

'Yes,' returned Rosamond, faintly; 'I believe your cousin *is* innocent of this terrible crime!'

As she spoke, she turned her head aside, for, heartless as she was, she could not bring herself to look, unmoved, on the

agonised face of her companion. Madge's cheeks were now as deathly white as Rosamond's, her trembling hands as cold. She came up close to Rosamond and spoke in quick trembling tones.

'*Believe?*' she said; 'do you not *know* that he is innocent? Can you not prove it, and by so doing force them to set him free?'

Rosamond raised her head, and looked for a moment straight into Madge's eyes. As she did so, her heart seemed suddenly to still its beating, for in that moment she learned the terrible truth. The secret of her connection with Conn Dunraven was a secret no longer—Madge knew; and since she herself had not told her, she must have learned the facts from her cousin's lips. Rosamond did not tremble now, nor did she feel any further pity for the girl who stood before her. She set her teeth

in determination, glanced proudly into Madge's face, and answered firmly :

'Really, Miss Dunraven, I do not understand you. How am I to prove that your cousin is guiltless? I believe in his innocence, but that is all!'

'Was he not with you alone that night? was it not to meet you that he went out into the woods? Can you not say that, and more? That he never in all his life harboured a cruel thought against Lord Rigby?'

'And you would have me tell all these untruths, cast this black suspicion on myself, to save your cousin?'

'I would not have you tell one untruth!' returned Madge. 'I only want you to be just. I know Conn left the house that night to meet you. If he met you, if he was with you when that murder was com-

mitted, why should you be afraid to speak and save him ?'

'Ah ! that is just it,' returned Rosamond, faintly ; 'if all these statements of yours were true, why should I hesitate to substantiate them ? But since they are entirely false, I really cannot see what all this has to do with me !'

'Then Conn was not with you ? He did not meet you that night ?'

'Why do you insult me by asking such a question ? You know where the murder was committed—you know what hour of the night it was—and yet you calmly ask me if I stood on that spot at midnight alone with a man whom I had only casually met once or twice before ! Really, Miss Dunraven,' she continued, 'this conversation is becoming too much even for me to bear. If you came here to-day to

offend me, you have succeeded, but remember that to try and sully my good name is certainly not the best means of ensuring your unfortunate cousin's safety!'

She turned to leave the room and so bring the interview to a close; but before she could open the door, Madge laid a detaining hand upon her arm. Rosamond turned at the touch, and looked quickly into her face.

'Well?' she said, 'have you anything more to say?'

'Only this: that you are a cold, cruel, heartless girl. The words you have spoken to me to-day are as false as those you uttered when you told my cousin that you loved him. I always thought you could not care for him; now I know you did not; and yet you were heartless enough to foster his passion day by day, and then to break

his heart. You are the cause of all this trouble—you, and only you, have led him into this, and now you wash your hands of him for ever! Well, perhaps it is all for the best. God will help him!'

'Once more—will you let me go?'

'Yes; I do not wish to detain you,' returned Madge, quietly; 'it would have been better for all of us if we had never seen your face!'

Without waiting to hear another word, Rosamond shook off the girl's detaining hand, and, ringing for the footman to show Miss Dunraven out, passed quickly upstairs to her own room. Having gained it, having locked the door, and assured herself that she was alone she threw herself into a chair and burst into passionate tears. When the storm was over, she raised her head, and saw for the first time that during

her absence from the room a letter had been placed upon her desk. She leaned forward to look at the address. The writing, a gentleman's, was perfectly unknown to her. The postmarks were Gresham and Armstead—nothing more. With trembling fingers she tore open the envelope, unfolded the letter, and read as follows:

'Gresham Gaol.

'Rosamond, come to me! I am lying here under the horrible accusation of murder—of the murder of Lord Rigby You know I am innocent. Come, and set me free!

'CONN DUNRAVEN.'

Rosamond read the note several times, and as she read her tears flowed forth.

Then she screwed it into a taper, lit one end at the fire, and meditatively watched it as it burned away.

That same afternoon Madge went to Gresham to pay her first visit to Conn. The interview was a painful one, and no one was exactly sorry when at length it was over. Madge felt that with the dreary prison walls around her, and Conn's pale handsome face so close to hers, she might be tempted to break her oath; and Conn on his part feared, every time her lips were opened, that she might utter something which would implicate the girl he loved. But Madge did not mention Rosamond's name. She believed, from Rosamond's statement, that Conn had not been with her that night; she also remembered how coolly the girl had renounced him. She

resolved to say nothing of all this to Conn. Troubles enough had come crowding upon him already; there was time yet for him to learn the truth about the girl for whom he felt so deep an infatuation.

So they remained together, and gazed with sorrowful eyes into each other's faces. Conn wondered at the utter intensity of her grief. She was so very strange: when he spoke hopefully of the future she clutched at every word as eagerly as if her own life were in danger; but when he asserted his innocence, she turned her head aside and burst into tears. When at length she was told that the interview must end, she stretched forth her hands towards him and sobbed as if her heart would break.

'God help me!' she sobbed. 'Oh, Conn, if you knew—if you only knew!'

Then, with an effort, she choked down

her sobs, and, after promising to come again, she left the wretched room for her home.

When she was gone, and Conn was in his cell, he sat down disconsolately on his bed, and gazed wearily at the window through which the fading daylight crept. He thought of Madge. He wondered now if she saw the look of disappointment which crossed his features when the gaoler opened the room-door and he saw her. He had expected Rosamond. Ever since the day before, when, through his solicitor, he had managed to get his letter conveyed to her, he had been watching and waiting, counting the hours as they dragged slowly by, and wondering why she did not come. Already one day had passed, another was passing, and in answer to his passionate appeal she had made no sign. Conn rose

from his bed, walked over to the window and raised his face to the pale beams of light which still crept slowly in. Had Rosamond seen him then, her heart might have melted, and her lips might have uttered the words which would have opened those doors for him to walk forth free. For the strength and beauty which had always fascinated her had never been more apparent than at that moment. Truly love had made a man of him; and the trouble and pain which he had been suddenly called upon to bear, had given a quiet dignity to his bearing, a pathetic look to his face, which enhanced his beauty tenfold. Conn was scarcely three and twenty, but his stalwart build and the grave cast of his features, gave him the look of men of maturer years. Everybody who came in contact with him seemed fascinated by his

appearance. Even his father, who had watched him grow from the bright-eyed, curly-haired boy into the still handsome but somewhat uncouth youth, opened his eyes at the sudden change to grave sober manhood. He could not think what had altered Conn; he only felt that his strength and beauty and manly fortitude made his lot ten times more pitiful. And Conn?—he too felt the change. As his love had deepened hour by hour, day by day, his whole nature had expanded, and he felt that the fulness of life was attained at last. He delighted in his own comeliness, only because *she* delighted in it. He had gazed into her eyes and thanked God for making him what he was, because he felt that through it he was worthy to mate with her. How he loved her! To him life with her by his side would be like one golden dream;

sorrow should not touch her, pain and trouble should never come near her, so long as he was by. When they were wed he would take her away from Armstead, and they would try to forget that they had ever lived before that day.

Meantime the daylight faded fast, and the cell was soon wrapped in gloom. All was very quiet; sometimes he heard a light footfall in the corridor without, but he did not start now: he knew it was too late for Rosamond to come.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTIAN COMFORT.

FOR six days the excitement in Armstead was at fever-heat; then it began gradually to cool down, and things naturally fell into the old routine. In every prominent place in the village bills were posted offering substantial rewards for the capture of the men, still at large, who had been concerned in the poaching affray; but since Conn Dunraven had been arrested, no further seizures had

been made. At Rigby Castle it was simply a case of 'le roi est mort, vive le roi!' When the rector had spoken the last benediction over the remains of his departed friend, the death-flag was hauled down from the Castle towers, the sorrowing friends were conveyed away to their homes, and all was much the same as it had been before. Rosamond, the possessor now, through Lord Rigby's will, of some thousands of pounds and a valuable collection of jewels, had accepted the invitation so generously tendered to her by the new lord, and continued to inhabit, with her maid, her apartments at Rigby Castle.

By no wish of her own, however; her stay in Armstead was compulsory, for she had been subpœnaed as a witness at Conn Dunraven's trial. Why had she been subpœnaed? What was she to prove?

These were questions which her fevered brain repeated every hour of the day and night. Could it be that Conn had spoken, or that some one of the keepers, roving about that night, had witnessed that last meeting, seen Conn clasp her in his arms at the very moment when the shot was fired? If they knew nothing of all this, why had they summoned her? If all her relations with Conn were to be brought to light, what would the end be?

By remaining perfectly inactive, Rosamond had allowed herself to be drifted into a position which was anything but pleasant to think over. At first she had believed that one little falsehood would be quite enough to relieve her of all responsibility in this unpleasant affair. She had told it to Madge, and although Madge had spoken harshly to her, she saw that in

this particular she was believed. Then came Conn's letter. *His* appeal touched her; still she hesitated and thought, 'What shall I do?'

How fast the days flew round, and how near the time was coming! In a few days more the case was to be brought on. Well, she must make up her mind to be put upon the rack; but what had she to say? Lord Rigby was eager that Conn Dunraven should be hung, but that it was in her power to save him, she knew only too well. If he had compromised her, she could either deny his statement or confirm it—which must it be? She could not decide; she only felt now that she would rather he had been destroyed a hundred times than ever have crossed her path.

Fortunately it was a time when she was expected to look sad, when her pale

cheeks and sometimes tear-stained eyes were suitable to the black robes she wore. The only ones who knew of her real feeling for the late Lord were the family at the Rectory, and these she seldom saw. They had their own troubles—troubles almost as weighty as any of hers. The gradual creeping on of the trial, which by this time was absorbing local interest a good deal, seemed like a weight bowing down the proud head of the rector—like a black shadow, creeping up slowly but surely to darken his home.

When the news of Conn's arrest first reached Mr. Aldyn's ears, his face went pale and his heart seemed suddenly to become cold and heavy as lead. For a moment there flashed across his brain a vision of his dead sister's son lying in a convict's cell to await a convict's death,

and during that moment there welled up in his soul a feeling of pity for his dead sister and the boy. But almost immediately a revulsion came: his heart grew cold, angry and pitiless, for he thought of the degradation which all this would bring upon himself.

'So it has come to this at last,' he murmured. 'Ever since that day when I lifted them from their sordid poverty and gave them a solid footing in the world, the work has been going forward, and to-day the climax is reached. For months past, I, the rector of the parish, have been known as the relative of people whose chief associates have been beggars and criminals, and before many weeks have passed it may be whispered abroad that my nephew is a murderer and about to suffer the extreme penalty of the law!

Well, they have chosen their path, let them henceforth walk in it alone.'

So when George Aldyn suggested that some one should go to the cottage to see if anything could be done for Mr. Dunraven and Madge, his father had set his teeth, and said :

'If you care to go—go. I have no power to control your actions. Your mother and I are going to Rigby Castle, and it seems to me that your proper place is there too !'

But after the first flood of his anger had passed away, and the rector began to look matters calmly in the face, he saw that by washing his hands of the whole affair, and letting Conn go straight to the gallows, he would be guilty of the utmost folly and callousness ; so he made up his mind to walk down to the cottage to offer his help

to Mr. Dunraven and Madge. His offer was not accepted, however. The cold unsympathetic manner of the clergyman, coupled with the condemnatory speeches which he uttered about Conn, roused both Mr. Dunraven and Madge to anger. After a short but rather stormy interview, he left the cottage, shaking the dust from his feet and mentally resolving that for the future he and his Irish relatives must remain as strangers to one another.

But although Mr. Aldyn apparently washed his hands of all responsibility in the matter and remained coldly apart, he could not but acknowledge to himself that it was a satisfaction to know that his son was working very assiduously on Conn's behalf; and he seemed ever ready to meet the demands for money which George was obliged to make.

'Of course,' he said to his son, as if to excuse his own liberality, 'I can repay myself out of the Irish rents which I am still drawing. They would borrow this money in any case—they may as well borrow it from me as from any one else!'

But when he found himself alone, the cold look of his face grew softer, for he thought of his favourite sister whom he had helped to place in her dreary Irish grave.

'Clara, my poor girl,' he said, 'you may rest in peace. I have more than fulfilled your prayer; and now, if my money can save your boy, he shall be saved!'

Madge and Mr. Dunraven seldom saw the rector now. After that stormy interview he never went near the cottage, and if he happened to meet them in the village he passed them by with a cold nod and a formal bow It was all that he could do, he

said to himself, after their ingratitude; and Madge, on her part, thought that no more was to be expected from a man who could find it in his heart to take the side of the world against his own flesh and blood. For though her anger against him had long since melted away, she had no reason for believing that he still nurtured in his heart any but hard thoughts against Conn. So, although it was a time when she was hungering for sympathy and good counsel, when kind words from a clergyman would have gone far towards lifting the load from her heart, she returned Mr. Aldyn's cold bows with bows as cold, and turned her face aside that he might not see the sorrow in her eyes.

Such was the existing state of things, when one Sunday evening Madge walked past the church-door just as the congrega-

[illegible] was streaming forth, and came face to face with the rector. Madge paused—Mr. Aldyn paused too, and looked for a moment into her agonised face; then, to her amazement, he took her hand, and, for the first time in his life, and before the eyes of all his people, stooped to kiss her forehead.

My dear child, he said quietly, 'you must not grieve like this. All that you can do is to believe in God's mercy, and put your trust in Him.' Then, seeing that the eyes of all his people were fixed upon him in astonishment, that his own son who stood apart had noted his actions with a peculiar look and smile, he set his teeth and walked away, looking more coldly unsympathetic than before.

[illegible] for Madge, after that brief scene [illegible] the rector, she went on her way like

one in a dream, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but those words which he had just spoken. Trust in God—was she not doing so? was it not this blind, implicit faith which was keeping her heart from breaking utterly? How often had she not cried on God, and yet, though her prayers were unanswered, her faith remained firm.

CHAPTER XIX.

OUT ON THE HEATH.

MADGE did not go home. The little cottage was now a dreary place. To sit there beside the fire, listening to the rattling of the hail or the raging of the winter wind, and think of Conn lying in gaol with the gallows looming in the distance; to see her uncle growing greyer each day, bowed and broken like an old man, all his cheerfulness gone, and his gentle eyes sometimes filling with tears

as he saw his boy's empty seat—all this was more than her heart could bear. And yet, what could she do? Once or twice she had knelt at her uncle's knee and opened her lips to speak, but the words had frozen on her tongue. And if she had spoken, would the authorities have believed her? No, she knew they would not, for she had no proof. Then she asked herself, where was the man? If she could only find him and tell him all, Conn might yet be exonerated. Day after day she had wandered about searching eagerly, but in vain; he had crept away and left not a single trace behind him.

Thus had the days rolled past one after another like drifting clouds, like waves of a windy sea; bringing the time of the trial woefully near. At first Madge had counted the weeks, then the days, now the hours.

In three or four days the trial would begin, and God only knew, thought Madge, how it would end.

The wind blew bitterly, and moaned with wailing voices across the hills. She had wandered some miles from home, and stood now on the extensive common or moorland which lay beyond Armstead. In the faint distance she saw the church-tower; before her was the dense growth of underwood which clothed the base of the hills. It was growing dark. The sky was heavy with rain-charged clouds, and these, rudely rent asunder by the fierce force of the blast, were pushed onward in jagged masses across the sky; then they mingled again, and, forming one large canopy of black, hung ominously above the earth.

Still Madge walked on. She did not notice the sky nor the road she was taking,

she felt only that all around her was very quiet and peaceful, and that the sharp sting of the winter wind was grateful to her parched lips and feverish brow. She was thinking of the old life which they had led before they came to England; of the happy days at Shranamonragh Castle; of the music and dancing, of the crowd of happy faces which had ever greeted them. Ah, how long that seemed ago! Would that time ever come again? would Conn ever again be free? Oh, if she could only find that man!

'God give him to me!' she cried in her anguish. 'I cannot face my uncle, I cannot let Conn die—this oath will kill me!'

As she spoke, she stood looking upward and for a time remained motionless. Night had come on apace; the wind shrieked, and every moment its touch grew bitterer still.

Beyond the peak of a distant hill rose the moon, casting its pale light down; the clouds covered over the stars, save here and there where they peeped from the jagged edges of the black vapour and looked with dim cold eyes upon the frozen earth.

With feverishly beating heart and tearless eyes, Madge stood looking at the pale moon, the glimmering stars, the silent hills around her. She was quite alone, out of sight of any human being, but she did not feel afraid. The coming of the daylight was what she dreaded, for when the moon drew in its light, and the sun rose, she would be brought one day nearer to the day of Conn's trial. Yes, that trial was inevitable; she could not make time stand still, all she could do was to watch and hope and trust in God.

She rose, and pulling her cloak about her, for she was pinched with the cold, was about to move away. Suddenly she felt her arm clutched—clutched and held by a human hand!

She shrieked—not so much from fear as surprise, and her heart seemed to cease its beating. In the intense silence which followed, she heard a voice say huskily:

'Hold your tongue, my lady! I don't want to harm you, but you must give me something. I'm just dead beat for the want of food!'

Madge did not answer, she could not. At the sound of that voice her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, her limbs grew paralysed, her heart seemed suddenly to stop. The bony fingers still clutched her arm, and, standing so, she

gradually turned her head and gazed full into a pair of wild famished eyes. The effect was miraculous! For a moment the eyes gazed as if fascinated into hers, while the livid lips opened and uttered a cry; then Madge felt herself hurled violently forward upon the ground.

She had fallen heavily; her head had struck the ground, and she lay for a time completely stunned.

When she recovered herself, she found that a violent hail-storm had come on. The great drops, beaten about by the wind, stung her face and hands and covered her clothes; the wind was growing into a hurricane, and the clouds were drifting tumultuously across the heavens.

She staggered to her feet and gazed wildly around her. All was blackness

and desolation; in her anguish she called out, and her words came back in echo. Not a soul seemed near. The darkness was now so dense, she could hardly see a foot before her.

The violence of the storm was increasing; the hail came down still heavier, the wind blew more keenly, sweeping up in wild gusts from the valley, then dying with dull murmurs across the heath. Scarcely able to keep her feet, with her face sorely stung by the hail, and her hair dishevelled by the wind, Madge searched about wildly; straining her eyes to gaze into the darkness, calling out with a voice now broken by sobs and tears. All in vain. That white face was but a vision, and it had faded. Nothing more could be done that night, so, weary and footsore,

more sick at heart than ever, Madge was at length fain to leave the open country and wend her way home through the storm.

END OF VOL. II.

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